WRITINGS OF

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING,

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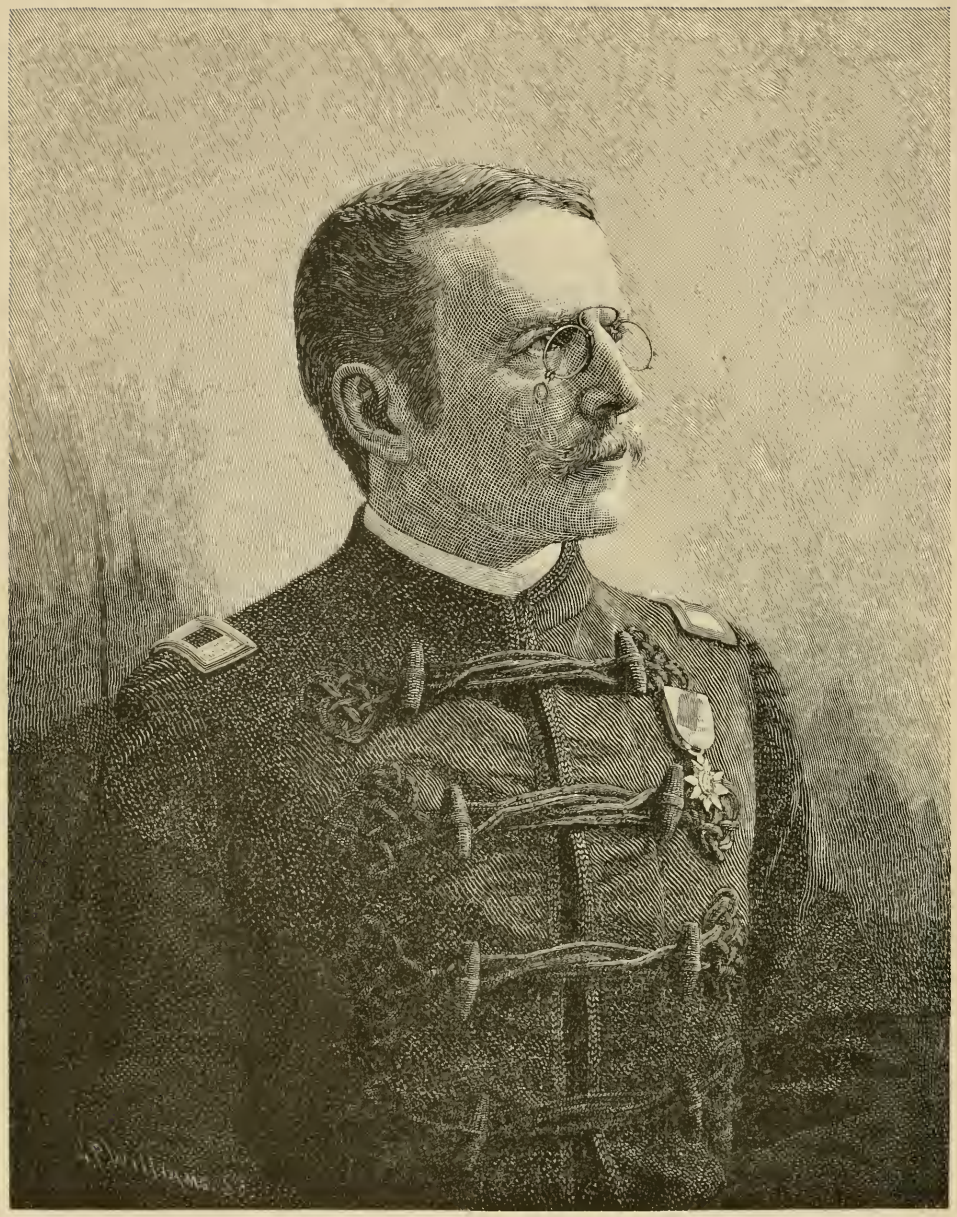

Charles King
Capt. U.S.A.

THE DESERTER.

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING,

U. S. ARMY,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "MARION'S FAITH," ETC., ETC.

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THE DESERTER.

PRELUDE.

FAR up in the Northwest, along the banks of the broad, winding stream the Sioux call the Elk, a train of white-topped army-wagons is slowly crawling eastward. The October sun is hot at noonday, and the dust from the loose soil rises like heavy smoke and powders every face and form in the guarding battalion so that features are wellnigh indistinguishable. Four companies of stalwart, sinewy infantry, with their brown rifles slung over the shoulder, are striding along in dispersed order, covering the exposed southern flank from sudden attack, while farther out along the ridge-line, and far to the front and rear, cavalry skirmishers and scouts are riding to and fro, searching every hollow and ravine, peering cautiously over every "divide," and signalling "halt" or "forward" as the indications warrant.

And yet not a hostile Indian has been seen; not one, even as distant vedette, has appeared in range of the binoculars, since the scouts rode in at daybreak to say that big bands were in the immediate neighborhood. It has been a long, hard summer's work for the troops, and the Indians have been, to all commands that boasted strength or swiftness, elusive as the Irishman's flea of tradition. Only to those whose numbers were weak or whose movements were hampered have they appeared in fighting-trim. But combinations have been too much for them, and at last they have been "herded" down to the Elk, have crossed, and are now seeking to make their way, with women, children, tepees, dogs, "travois," and the great pony herds, to the fastnesses of the Big Horn; and now comes the opportunity for which an old Indian-fighter has been anxiously waiting. In a big cantonment he has held the main body under his command, while keeping out constant scouting-parties to the east and north. He knows well that, true to their policy, the

Indians will have scattered into small bands capable of reassembling anywhere that signal smokes may call them, and his orders are to watch all the crossings of the Elk and nab them as they come into his district. He watches, despite the fact that it is his profound conviction that the Indians will be no such idiots as to come just where they are wanted, and he is in no wise astonished when a courier comes in on jaded horse to tell him that they have "doubled" on the other column and are now two or three days' march away down stream, "making for the big bend." His own scouting-parties are still out to the eastward: he can pick them up as he goes. He sends the main body of his infantry, a regiment jocularly known as "The Riflers," to push for a landing some fifty miles down-stream, scouting the lower valley of the Sweet Root on the way. He sends his wagon-train, guarded by four companies of foot and two of horsemen, by the only practicable road to the bend, while he, with ten seasoned "troops" of his pet regiment, the —th Cavalry, starts forthwith on a long détour in which he hopes to "round up" such bands as may have slipped away from the general rush. Even as "boots and saddles" is sounding, other couriers come riding in from Lieutenant Crane's party. He has struck the trail of a big band.

When the morning sun dawns on the picturesque valley in which the cantonment nestled but the day before, it illumines an almost deserted village, and brings no joy to the souls of some twoscore of embittered civilians who had arrived only the day previous, and whose unanimous verdict is that the army is a fraud and ought to be abolished. For four months or more some three regiments had been camping, scouting, roughing it thereabouts, with not a cent of pay. Then came the wildly exciting tidings that a boat was on the way up the Missouri with a satrap of the pay department, vast store of shekels, and a strong guard, and as a consequence there would be some two thousand men around the cantonment with pockets full of money and no one to help them spend it, and nothing suitable to spend it on. It was a duty all citizens owed to the Territory to hasten to the scene and gather in for local circulation all that was obtainable of that disbursement; otherwise the curse of the army might get ahead of them and the boys would gamble it away among themselves or spend it for vile whiskey manufactured for their sole benefit. Gallatin Valley was emptied of its prominent practitioners in the game of poker. The stream was black with "Mackinaw" boats and other craft. There was a rush for the cantonment that rivalled the multitudes of the mining days, but all too late. The command was already packing up when the first contingent arrived, and the commanding officer, recognizing the fraternity at a glance, warned them outside the limits of camp that night, declined their services as volunteers on the impending campaign, and treated them with such calmly courteous recognition of their true character that the Eastern press was speedily filled with sneering comment on the hopelessness of ever subduing the savage tribes of the Northwest when the government intrusts the duty to upstart officers of the regular service whose sole conception of their functions is to treat with insult and contempt the hardy frontiersman whose mere presence with the

command would be of incalculable benefit. "We have it from indisputable authority," says *The Miner's Light* of Brandy Gap, "that when our esteemed fellow-citizen Hank Mulligan and twenty gallant shots and riders like himself went in a body to General —— at the cantonment and offered their services as volunteers against the Sioux now devastating the homesteads and settlements of the Upper Missouri and Yellowstone valleys, they were treated with haughty and contemptuous refusal by that bandbox caricature of a soldier and threatened with arrest if they did not quit the camp. When *will* the United States learn that its frontiers can never be purged of the Indian scourges of our civilization until the conduct of affairs in the field is intrusted to other hands than these martinets of the drill-ground? It is needless to remark in this connection that the expedition led by General —— has proved a complete failure, and that the Indians easily escaped his clumsily-led forces."

The gamblers, though baffled for the time being, of course "get square," and more too, with the unfortunate general in this sort of warfare, but they are a disgusted lot as they hang about the wagon-train as last of all it is being hitched-in to leave camp. Some victims, of course, they have secured, and there are no devices of commanding officers which can protect their men against those sharks of the prairies when the men themselves are bound to tempt Providence and play. There are two scowling faces in the cavalry escort that has been left back with the train, and Captain Hull, the commanding officer, has reprimanded Sergeants Clancy and Gower in stinging terms for their absence from the command during the night. There is little question where they spent it, and both have been "cleaned out." What makes it worse, both have lost money that belonged to other men in the command, and they are in bad odor accordingly.

The long day's march has tempered the joviality of the entire column. It is near sundown, and still they keep plodding onward, making for a grassy level on the river-bank a good mile farther.

"Old Hull seems bound to leave the sports as far behind as possible, if he has to march us until midnight," growls the battalion adjutant to his immediate commander. "By thunder! one would think he was afraid they would get in a lick at his own pile."

"How much did you say he was carrying?" asks Captain Rayner, checking his horse for a moment to look back over the valley at the long, dust-enveloped column.

"Nearly three thousand dollars in one wad."

"How does he happen to have such a sum?"

"Why, Crane left his pay-accounts with him. He drew all that was due his men who are off with Crane,—twenty of them,—for they had signed the rolls before going, and were expected back to-day. Then he has some six hundred dollars company fund; and the men of his troop asked him to take care of a good deal besides. The old man has been with them so many years they look upon him as a father and trust him as implicitly as they would a savings-bank."

"That's all very well," answers Rayner; "but I wouldn't want to carry any such sum with me."

"It's different with Hull's men, captain. They are ordered in through the posts and settlements. They have a three weeks' march ahead of them when they get through their scout, and they want their money on the way. It was only after they had drawn it that the news came of the Indians' crossing and of our having to jump for the war-path. Everybody thought yesterday morning that the campaign was about over so far as we are concerned. Halloo! here comes young Hayne. Now, what does *he* want?"

Riding a quick, nervous little bay troop horse, a slim-built officer, with boyish face, laughing blue eyes, and sunny hair, comes loping up the long prairie wave; he shouts cheery greeting to one or two brother subalterns who are plodding along beside their men, and exchanges some merry chaff with Lieutenant Ross, who is prone to growl at the luck which has kept him afoot and given to this favored youngster a "mount" and a temporary staff position. The boy's spirits and fun seem to jar on Rayner's nerves. He regards him blackly as he rides gracefully towards the battalion commander, and with decidedly nonchalant ease of manner and an "off-hand" salute that has an air about it of saying, "I do this sort of thing because one has to, but it doesn't really mean anything, you know," Mr. Hayne accosts his superior:

"Ah, good-evening, captain. I have just come back from the front, and Captain Hull directed me to give you his compliments and say that we would camp in the bend yonder, and he would like you to post strong pickets and have a double guard to-night."

"Have *me* post double guards! How the devil does he expect me to do that after marching all day?"

"I did not inquire, sir: he might have told me 'twas none of my business, don't you know?" And Mr. Hayne has the insufferable hardihood to wink at the battalion adjutant,—a youth of two years' longer service than his own.

"Well, Mr. Hayne, this is no matter for levity," says Rayner, angrily. "What does Captain Hull mean to do with his own men, if I'm to do the guard?"

"That is another point, Captain Rayner, which I had not the requisite effrontery to inquire into. Now, *you* might ask him, but I couldn't, don't you know?" responds Hayne, smiling amiably the while into the wrathful face of his superior. It serves only to make the indignant captain more wrathful; and no wonder. There has been no love lost between the two since Hayne joined the Riflers early the previous year. He came in from civil life, a city-bred boy, fresh from college, full of spirits, pranks, fun of every kind; a wonderfully keen hand with the billiard-cue; a knowing one at cards and such games of chance as college boys excel at; a musician of no mean pretensions, and an irrepressible leader in all the frolics and frivolities of his comrades. He had leaped to popularity from the start. He was full of courtesy and gentleness to women, and became a pet in social circles. He was frank, free, off-handed with his associates, spending lavishly, "treating" with boyish ostentation on all occasions, living quite *en grand seigneur*, for he seemed to have a little money outside his pay, —"a windfall from a good old duffer of an uncle," as he had explained

it. His father, a scholarly man who had been summoned to an important under-office in the State Department during the War of the Rebellion, had lived out his honored life in Washington and died poor, as such men must ever die. It was his wish that his handsome, spirited, brave-hearted boy should enter the army, and long after the sod had hardened over the father's peaceful grave the young fellow donned his first uniform and went out to join "The Riflers." High-spirited, joyous, full of laughing fun, he was "Pet" Hayne before he had been among them six months. But within the year he had made one or two enemies. It could not be said of him that he showed that deference to rank and station which was expected of a junior officer; and among the seniors were several whom he speedily designated "unconscionable old duffers" and treated with as little semblance of respect as a second lieutenant could exhibit and be permitted to live. Rayner prophesied of him that, as he had no balance and was burning his candle at both ends, he would come to grief in short order. Hayne retorted that the only balance that Rayner had any respect for was one at the banker's, and that it was notorious in Washington that the captain's father had made most of his money in government contracts, and that the captain's original commission in the regulars was secured through well-paid Congressional influence. The fact that Rayner had developed into a good officer did not wipe out the recollection of these facts; and he could have throttled Hayne for reviving them. It was "a game of give and take," said the youngster; and he "behaved himself" to those who were at all decent in their manner to him.

It was a thorn in Rayner's flesh, therefore, when Hayne joined from leave of absence, after experiences not every officer would care to encounter in getting back to his regiment, that Captain Hull should have induced the general to detail him in place of the invalided field quartermaster when the command was divided. Hayne would have been a junior subaltern in Rayner's little battalion but for that detail, and it annoyed the captain more seriously than he would confess.

"It is all an outrage and a blunder to pick out a boy like that," he growls between his set teeth as Hayne canters blithely away. "Here he's been away from the regiment all summer long, having a big time and getting head over ears in debt, I hear, and the moment he rejoins they put him in charge of the wagon-train as field quartermaster. It's putting a premium on being young and cheeky,—besides absenteeism," he continues, growing blacker every minute.

"Well, captain," answers his adjutant, injudiciously, "I think you don't give Hayne credit for coming back on the jump the moment we were ordered out. It was no fault of his he could not reach us. He took chances *I* wouldn't take."

"Oh, yes! you kids all swear by Hayne because he's a good fellow and sings a jolly song and plays the piano—and poker. One of these days he'll swamp you all, sure as shooting. He's in debt *now*, and it'll fetch him before you know it. What he needs is to be under a captain who could discipline him a little. By Jove, I'd do it!" And Rayner's teeth emphasize the assertion.

The young adjutant thinks it advisable to say nothing that may

provoke further vehemence. All the same, he remembers Rayner's bitterness of manner, and has abundant cause to.

When the next morning breaks, chill and pallid, a change has come in the aspect of affairs. During the earliest hour of the dawn the red light of a light-draught river-boat startled the outlying pickets down-stream, and the Far West, answering the muffled hail from shore, responded, through the medium of a mate's stentorian tones, "News that'll rout you fellows out." The sun is hardly peeping over the jagged outline of the eastern hills when, with Rayner's entire battalion aboard, she is steaming again down-stream, with orders to land at the mouth of the Sweet Root. There the four companies will disembark in readiness to join the rest of the regiment.

All day long again the wagon-train twists and wriggles through an ashen section of Les Mauvaises Terres. It is a tedious, trying march for Hull's little command of troopers,—all that is now left to guard the train. The captain is constantly out on the exposed flank, eagerly scanning the rough country to the south, and expectant any moment of an attack from that direction. He and his men, as well as the horses, mules, and teamsters, are fairly tired out when at nightfall they park the wagons in a big semicircle, with the broad river forming a shining chord to the arc of white canvas. All the live-stock are safely herded within the enclosure; a few reliable soldiers are posted well out to the south and east, to guard against surprise, and the veteran Sergeant Clancy is put in command of the sentries. The captain gives strict injunctions as to the importance of these duties; for he is far from easy in his mind over the situation. The Riflers, he knows, are over in the valley of the Sweet Root. The steamer with Rayner's men is tied up at the bank some five miles below, around the bend. The —th are far off to the northward across the Elk, as ordered, and must be expecting on the morrow to make for the old Indian "ferry" opposite Battle Butte. The main body of the Sioux are reported farther down stream, but he feels it in his bones that there are numbers of them within signal, and he wishes with all his heart the —th were here. Still, the general was sure he would stir up war-parties on the other shore. Individually, he has had very little luck in scouting during the summer, and he cannot help wishing he were with the rest of the crowd instead of here, train-guarding.

Presently Mr. Hayne appears, elastic and debonair as though he had not been working like a horse all day. His voice sounds so full of cheer and life that Hull looks up smilingly:

"Well, youngster, you seem to love this frontier life."

"Every bit of it, captain. I was cut out for the army, as father thought."

"We used to talk it over a good deal in the old days when I was stationed around Washington," answers Hull. "Your father was the warmest friend I had in civil circles, and he made it very pleasant for me. How little we thought it would be my luck to have you for quartermaster!"

"The fellows seemed struck all of a heap in the Riflers at the idea of your applying for me, captain. I was ready to swear it was all on

father's account, and would have told them so, only Rayner happened to be the first man to tackle me on the subject, and he was so crusty about it I kept the whole thing to myself rather than give him any satisfaction."

"Larry, my boy, I'm no preacher, but I want to be the friend to you your father was to me. You are full of enthusiasm and life and spirits, and you love the army ways and have made yourself very popular with the youngsters, but I'm afraid you are too careless and independent where the seniors are concerned. Rayner is a good soldier; and you show him very scant respect, I'm told."

"Well, he's such an interfering fellow. They will all tell you I'm respectful enough to—to the captains I like——"

"That's just it, Lawrence. So long as you like a man your manner is what it should be. What a young soldier ought to learn is to be courteous and respectful to senior officers whether he likes them or not. It costs an effort sometimes, but it tells. You never know what trouble you are laying up for yourself in the army by bucking against men you don't like. They may not be in position to resent it at the time, but the time is mighty apt to come when they *will* be, and then you are helpless."

"Why, Captain Hull, I don't see it that way at all. It seems to me that so long as an officer attends to his duty, minds his own business, and behaves like a gentleman, no one can harm him; especially when all the good fellows of the regiment are his friends, as they are mine, I think, in the Riflers."

"Ah, Hayne, it is a hard thing to teach a youngster that—that there are men who find it very easy to make their juniors' lives a burden to them, and without overstepping a regulation. It is harder yet to say that friends in the army are a good deal like friends out of it: one only has to get into serious trouble to find how few they are. God grant you may never have to learn it, my boy, as many another has had to, by sharp experience! Now we must get a good night's rest. You sleep like a log, I see, and I can only take cat-naps. Confound this money! How I wish I could get rid of it!"

"Where do you keep it to-night?"

"Right here in my saddle-bags under my head. Nobody can touch them that I do not wake; and my revolver is here under the blanket. Hold on! Let's take a look and see if everything is all right." He holds a little camp-lantern over the bags, opens the flap, and peers in. "Yes,—all serene. I got a big hunk of green sealing-wax from the paymaster and sealed it all up in one package with the memorandum-list inside. It's all safe so far,—even to the hunk of sealing-wax.—What is it, sergeant?"

A tall, soldierly, dark-eyed trooper appears at the door-way of the little tent, and raises his gauntleted hand in salute. His language, though couched in the phraseology of the soldier, tells both in choice of words and in the intonation of every phrase that he is a man whose antecedents have been far different from those of the majority of the rank and file:

"Will the captain permit me to take my horse and those of three

or four more men outside the corral? Sergeant Clancy says he has no authority to allow it. We have found a patch of excellent grass, sir, and there is hardly any left inside. I will sleep by my picket-pin, and one of us will keep awake all the time, if the captain will permit."

"How far away is it, sergeant?"

"Not seventy-five yards, sir,—close to the river-bank east of us."

"Very well. Send Sergeant Clancy here, and I'll give the necessary orders."

The soldier quietly salutes, and disappears in the gathering darkness.

"That's what I like about that man Gower," says the captain, after a moment's silence. "He is always looking out for his horse. If he were not such a gambler and rake he would make a splendid first-sergeant. Fine-looking fellow, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir. That is a face that one couldn't well forget. Who was the other sergeant you overhauled for getting fleeced by those sharps at the cantonment?"

"Clancy? He's on guard to-night. A very different character."

"I don't know him by sight as yet. Well, good-night, sir. I'll take myself off and go to my own tent."

Daybreak again, and far to the east the sky is all ablaze. The mist is creeping from the silent shallows under the banks, but all is life and vim along the shore. With cracking whip, tugging trace, sonorous blasphemy, and ringing shout, the long train is whirling ahead almost at the run. All is athrill with excitement, and bearded faces have a strange, set look about the jaws, and eyes gleam with eager light and peer searchingly from every rise far over to the southeast, where stands a tumbling heap of hills against the lightening sky. "Off there, are they?" says a burly trooper, dismounting hastily to tighten up the "cinch" of his weather-beaten saddle. "We can make it quick enough, 's soon as we get rid of these blasted wagons." And, swinging into saddle again, he goes cantering down the slope, his charger snorting with exhilaration in the keen morning air.

Before dawn a courier has galloped into camp, bearing a despatch from the commanding officer of the Riflers. It says but few words, but they are full of meaning: "We have found a big party of hostiles. They are in strong position, and have us at disadvantage. Rayner with his four companies is hurrying to us. Leave all wagons with the boat under guard, and come with every horse and man you can bring."

Before seven o'clock the wagons are parked close along the bank beside the Far West, and Hull, with all the men he can muster,—some fifty,—is trotting ahead on the trail of Rayner's battalion. With him rides Mr. Hayne, eager and enthusiastic. Before ten o'clock, far up along the slopes they see the blue line of skirmishers, and the knots of reserves farther down, all at a stand. In ten minutes they ride with foaming reins in behind a low ridge on which, flat on their faces and cautiously peering over the crest, some hundred infantrymen are disposed. Others, officers and file-closers, are moving to and fro in rear.

They are of Rayner's battalion. Farther back, down in a ravine a dozen forms are outstretched upon the turf, and others are bending over them, ministering to the needs of those who are not past help already. Several officers crowd around the leading horsemen, and Hull orders, "Halt, dismount, and loosen girths." The grave faces show that the infantry has had poor luck, and the situation is summarized in few words. The Indians are in force occupying the ravines and ridges opposite them and confronting the six companies farther over to the west. Two attacks have been made, but the Indian fire swept every approach, and both were unsuccessful. Several soldiers were shot dead, others severely wounded. Lieutenant Warren's leg is shattered below the knee; Captain Blount is killed.

"Where's Rayner?" asks Hull, with grave face.

"Just gone off with the chief to look at things over on the other front. The colonel is hopping. He is bound to have those Indians out of there or drop a-trying. They'll be back in a minute. The general had a rousing fight with Dull Knife's people down the river last evening. You missed it again, Hull: all the —th were there but F and K,—and of course old Firewater wants to make as big a hit here."

"The —th fighting down the river last night?" asks Hull, in amaze.

"Yes,—swept clean round them and ran 'em into the stream, they say. I wish we had them where we could see 'em at all. You don't get the glimpse of a head, even; but all those rocks are lined with the beggars. Damn them!" says the adjutant, feelingly.

"We'll get our chance *here*, then," replies Hull, reflectively. "I'll creep up and take a look at it. Take my horse, orderly."

He is back in two minutes, graver than before, but his bearing is spirited and firm. Hayne watches him with kindling eye.

"You'll take me in with you when you charge?" he asks.

"It is no place to charge there. The ground is all cut up with ravines and gullies, and they've got a cross-fire that sweeps it clean. We'll probably go in on the other flank; it's more open there. Here comes the chief now."

Two officers come riding hastily around a projecting point of the slope and spur at rapid gait towards the spot where the cavalry have dismounted and are breathing their horses. There is hardly time for salutations. A gray-headed, keen-eyed, florid-faced old soldier is the colonel, and he is snapping with electricity, apparently.

"This way, Hull. Come right here, and I'll show you what you are to do." And, followed by Rayner, Hull, and Hayne, the chief rides sharply over to the extreme left of the position and points to the frowning ridge across the intervening swale:

"There, Hull: there are twenty or thirty of the rascals in there who get a flank fire on us when we attack on our side. What I want you to do is to mount your men, let them draw pistol and be all ready. Rayner, here, will line the ridge to keep them down in front. I'll go back to the right and order the attack at once. The moment we begin and you hear our shots, you give a yell, and charge full tilt across there,

so as to drive out those fellows in that ravine. We can do the rest. Do you understand?"

"I understand, colonel; but——is it your order that I attempt to charge mounted across that ground?"

"Why, certainly! It isn't the best in the world, but you can make it. They can't do very much damage to your men before you reach them. It's *got* to be done; it's the only way."

"Very good, sir: that ends it!" is the calm, soldierly reply; and the colonel goes bounding away.

A moment later the troop is in saddle, eager, wiry, bronzed fellows every one, and the revolvers are in hand and being carefully examined. Then Captain Hull signals to Hayne, while Rayner and three or four soldiers sit in silence, watching the man who is to lead the charge. He dismounts at a little knoll a few feet away, tosses his reins to the trumpeter, and steps to his saddle-bags. Hayne, too, dismounts.

Taking his watch and chain from the pocket of his hunting-shirt, he opens the saddle-bag on the near side and takes therefrom two packets,—one heavily sealed,—which he hands to Hayne.

"In case I—don't come back, you know what to do with these,—as I told you last night."

Hayne only looks imploringly at him: "You are not going to leave me *here*, captain?"

"Yes, Hayne. You can't go with us. Hark! There they go at the right. Are the packages all right?"

Hayne, with stunned faculties, thinking only of the charge he longs to make,—not of the one he has to keep,—replies he knows not what. There is a ringing bugle-call far off among the rocks to the westward; a rousing cheer; a rattling volley. Rayner springs off to his men on the hill-side. Hull spurs in front of his eager troop, holding high his pistol-hand:

"Now, men, follow till I drop; and then keep ahead! Come on!"

There is a furious sputter of hoofs, a rush of excited steeds up the gentle slope, a glad outburst of cheers as they sweep across the ridge and out of sight, then the clamor and yell of frantic battle; and when at last it dies away, the Riflers are panting over the hard-won position and shaking hands with some few silent cavalrymen. They have carried the ridge, captured the migrating village, squaws, ponies, travois, and pappooses; their "long Toms" have sent many a stalwart warrior to the mythical hunting-grounds, and the peppery colonel's triumph is complete.

But Lawrence Hayne, with all the light gone from his brave young face, stands mutely looking down upon the stiffening frame of his father's old friend, and his, who lies shot through the heart.

I.

In the Pullman car of the westward-bound express, half-way across the continent, two passengers were gazing listlessly out over the wintry

landscape. It was a bitter morning in February. North and south the treeless prairie rolled away in successive ridge and depression. The snow lay deep in the dry ravines and streaked the sea-like surface with jagged lines of foam between which lay broad spaces clean-swept by the gale. Heavy masses of cloud, dark and forbidding, draped the sky from zenith to horizon, and the air was thick with spiteful gusts and spits of snow, crackling against the window-panes, making fierce dashes every time a car door was hurriedly opened, and driving about the platforms like a myriad swarm of fleecy and aggressive gnats raging for battle. Every now and then, responsive to some wilder blast, a blinding white cloud came whirling from the depths of the nearest gully and breaking like spray over the snow fence along the line. Not a sign of life was visible. The tiny mounds in the villages of the prairie-dogs seemed blocked and frozen ; even the trusty sentinel had "deserted post" and huddled with his fellows for warmth and shelter in the bowels of the earth. Fluttering owl and skulking coyote, too, had vanished from the face of nature. Timid antelope—fleetest coursers of the prairie—and stolid horned cattle had gone, none knew whither, nor cared to know until the "blizzard" had subsided. Two heavy engines fought their way, panting, into the very teeth of the gale and slowly wound the long train after them up-grade among the foot-hills of the great plateau of the Rockies. Once in a while, when stopping for a moment at some group of brown-painted sheds and earth-battened shanties, the wind moaned and howled among the iron braces and brake-chains beneath the car and made such mournful noise that it was a relief to start once more and lose sound of its wailing in the general rumble. As for the scenery, only as a picture of shiver-provoking monotony and desolation would one care to take a second look.

And yet, some miles ahead, striving hard to reach the railway in time to intercept this very train, a small battalion of cavalry was struggling through the blasts, officers and men afoot and dragging their own benumbed limbs and half-benumbed chargers through the drifts that lay deep at the bottom of every "coulée." Some few soldiers remained in saddle : they were too frozen to walk at all. Some few fell behind, and would have thrown themselves flat upon the prairie in the lethargy that is but premonition of death by freezing. Like men half deadened by morphine, their rescue depended on heroic measures, humane in their seeming brutality. Officers who at other times were all gentleness now fell upon the hapless stragglers with kicks and blows. As the train drew up at the platform of a station in mid-prairie, a horseman enveloped in fur and frost and steam from his panting steed reined up beside the leading engine and shouted to the occupants of the cab,—

"For God's sake hold on a few minutes. We've got a dozen frozen men with us we must send on to Fort Warrener." And the train was held.

Meantime, those far to the rear in the sleeper knew nothing of what was going on ahead. The car was warm and comfortable, and most of its occupants were apparently appreciative of its shelter and coseyness in contrast with the cheerless scene without. A motherly-

looking woman had produced her knitting, and was blithely clicking away at her needles, while her enterprising son, a youth of four summers and undaunted confidence in human nature, tacked up and down the aisle and made impetuous incursions on the various sections by turns, receiving such modified welcome as could be accorded features streaked with mingled candy and cinders, and fingers whose propensity to cling to whatsoever they touched was due no more to instincts of a predatory nature than to the adhesive properties of the glucose which formed so large a constituent of the confections he had been industriously consuming since early morning. Four men playing whist in the rearmost section, two or three commercial travellers, whose intimacy with the porter and airs of easy proprietorship told of an apparent controlling interest in the road, a young man of reserved manners, reading in a section all by himself, a baby sleeping quietly upon the seat opposite the two passengers first mentioned, and a Maltese kitten curled up in the lap of one of them, completed the list of occupants.

The proximity of the baby and the kitten furnishes strong presumptive evidence of the sex and general condition of the two passengers referred to, and renders detail superfluous. A baby rarely travels without a woman, or a kitten with a woman already encumbered with a baby. The baby belonged to the elder passenger, the kitten to the younger. The one was a buxom matron, the other a slender maid. In their ages there must have been a difference of fifteen years; in feature there was still wider disparity. The elder was a fine-looking woman, and one who prided herself upon the Junoesque proportions which she occasionally exhibited in a stroll for exercise up and down the aisle. Yet no one would call her a beauty. Her eyes were of a somewhat fishy and uncertain blue; the lids were tinged with an unornamental pink that told of irritation of the adjacent interior surface and of possible irritability of temper. Her complexion was of that mottled type which is so sore a trial to its possessor and yet so inestimable a comfort to social rivals; but her features were handsome, her teeth fine, her dress, bearing, and demeanor those of a woman of birth and breeding, and yet one who might have resented the intimation that she was not strikingly handsome. She looked like a woman with a will of her own; her head was high, her step was firm; it was of just such a walk as hers that Virgil wrote his "*vera incessu patuit dea*," and she made the young man in the section by himself think of that very passage as he glanced at her from under his heavy, bushy eyebrows. She looked, moreover, like a woman with a capacity for influencing people contrary to their will and judgment, and with a decided fondness for the exercise of that unpopular function. There was the air of *grande dame* about her, despite the simplicity of her dress, which, though of rich material, was severely plain. She wore no jewelry. Her hands were snugly gloved, and undisfigured by the distortions of any ring except the marriage circlet. Her manner attested her a person of consequence in her social circle and one who realized the fact. She had repelled, though without rudeness or discourtesy, the garrulous efforts of the motherly knitter to be sociable. She had promptly inspired the small, candy-crusted explorer with such awe that he had refrained from

further visits after his first confiding attempt to poke a sticky finger through the baby's velvety cheek. She had spared little scorn in her rejection of the *bourgeois* advances of the commercial traveller with the languishing eyes of Israel: he confided to his comrades, in relating the incident, that she was smart enough to see that it wasn't *her* he was hankering to know, but the pretty sister by her side; and when challenged to prove that they *were* sisters,—a statement which aroused the scepticism of his shrewd associates,—he had replied, substantially,—

"How do I know? 'Cause I saw their pass before you was up this morning, cully. It's for Mrs. Captain Rayner and sister, and they're going out here to Fort Warrener. That's how I know." And the porter of the car had confirmed the statement in the sanctity of the smoking-room.

And yet—such is the uncertainty of feminine temperament—Mrs. Rayner was no more incensed at the commercial "gent" because he had obtruded his attentions than she was at the young man reading in his own section because he had refrained. Nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed since they crossed the Missouri, and in all that time not once had she detected in him a glance that betrayed the faintest interest in her, or—still more remarkable—in the unquestionably lovely girl at her side. Intrusiveness she might resent, but indifference she would and did. Who was this youth, she wondered, who not once had so much as stolen a look at the sweet, bonny face of her maiden sister? Surely 'twas a face any man would love to gaze upon,—so fair, so exquisite in contour and feature, so pearly in complexion, so lovely in the deep, dark brown of its shaded eyes.

The bold glances of the four card-players she had defiantly returned, and vanquished. Those men, like the travelling gents, were creatures of coarser mould; but her experienced eye told her the solitary occupant of the opposite section was a gentleman. The clear cut of his pale features, the white, slender hand and shapely foot, the style and finish of his quiet travelling-dress, the soft modulation and refined tone of his voice on the one occasion when she heard him reply to some importunity of the train-boy with his endless round of equally questionable figs and fiction, the book he was reading,—a volume of Emerson,—all combined to speak of a culture and position equal to her own. She had been over the trans-continental railways often enough to know that it was permissible for gentlemen to render their fellow-passengers some slight attention which would lead to mutual introductions if desirable; and this man refused to see that the opportunity was open to him.

True, when first she took her survey of those who were to be her fellow-travellers at the "transfer" on the Missouri, she decided that here was one against whom it would be necessary to guard the approaches. She had good and sufficient reasons for wanting no young man as attractive in appearance as this one making himself interesting to pretty Nellie on their journey. She had already decided what Nellie's future was to be. Never, indeed, would she have taken her to the gay frontier station whither she was now *en route*, had not that future been already settled to her satisfaction. Nellie Travers, barely out of school, was betrothed, and willingly so, to the man she, her

devoted elder sister, had especially chosen. Rare and most unlikely of conditions! she had apparently fallen in love with the man picked out for her by somebody else. She was engaged to Mrs. Rayner's fascinating friend Mr. Steven Van Antwerp, a scion of an old and esteemed and wealthy family; and Mr. Van Antwerp, who had been educated abroad, and had a Heidelberg scar on his left cheek, and dark, lustrous eyes, and wavy hair,—almost raven,—was a devoted lover, though fully fifteen years Miss Nellie's senior.

Full of bliss and comfort was Mrs. Rayner's soul as she journeyed westward to rejoin her husband at the distant frontier post she had not seen since the early spring. Army woman as she was, born and bred under the shadow of the flag, a soldier's daughter, a soldier's wife, she had other ambitions for her beautiful Nell. Worldly to the core, she herself would never have married in the army but for the unusual circumstance of a wealthy subaltern among the officers of her father's regiment. Tradition had it that Mr. Rayner was not among the number of those who sighed for Kate Travers's guarded smiles. Her earlier victims were kept a-dangling until Rayner, too, succumbed, and then were sent adrift. She meant that no penniless subaltern should carry off her "baby sister,"—they had long been motherless,—and a season at the sea-shore had done her work well. Steven Van Antwerp, with genuine distress and loneliness, went back to his duties in Wall Street after seeing them safely on their way to the West. "Guard her well for me," he whispered to Mrs. Rayner. "I dread those fellows in buttons." And he shivered unaccountably as he spoke.

Nellie was pledged, therefore, and this youth in the Pullman was not one of "those fellows in buttons," so far as Mrs. Rayner knew, but she was ready to warn him off, and meant to do so, until, to her surprise, she saw that he gave no symptom of a desire to approach. By noon of the second day she was as determined to extract from him some sign of interest as she had been determined to resent it. I can in no wise explain or account for this. The fact is stated without remark.

"What on earth can we be stopping so long here for?" was Mrs. Rayner's somewhat petulant inquiry, addressed to no one in particular. There was no reply. Miss Travers was busily twitching the ears of the kitten at the moment and sparring with upraised finger at the threatening paw.

"Do look out of the window, Nell, and see."

"There is nothing to see, Kate,—nothing but whirling drifts and a big water-tank all covered with ice. Br-r-r-r! how cold it looks!" she answered, after vainly flattening her face against the inner pane.

"There must be something the matter, though," persisted Mrs. Rayner. "We have been here full five minutes, and we are behind time now. At this rate we'll never get to Warrener to-night. I do wish the porter would stay here where he belongs."

The young man quietly laid down his book and arose. "I will inquire, madame," he said, with grave courtesy. "You shall know in a moment."

"How *very* kind of you!" said the lady. "Indeed I must not trouble you. I'm sure the porter will be here after a while."

And even as she spoke, and as he was pulling on an overcoat, the train rumbled off again. Then came an exclamation, this time from the younger:

"Why, Kate! Look! see all these men,—and horses! Why, they are soldiers,—cavalry! Oh, how I love to see them again! But, oh, how cold they look!—frozen!"

"Who *can* they be?" said Mrs. Rayner, all vehement interest now, and gazing eagerly from the window at the lowered heads of the horses and the muffled figures in blue and fur. "What *can* they be doing in the field in such awful weather? I cannot recognize one of them, or tell officers from men. Surely that must be Captain Wayne,—and Major Stannard. Oh, what can it mean?"

The young man had suddenly leaped to the window behind them, and was gazing out with an eagerness and interest little less apparent than her own, but in a moment the train had whisked them out of sight of the storm-beaten troopers. Then he hurried to the rear window of the car, and Mrs. Rayner as hastily followed.

"*Do* you know them?" she asked.

"Yes. That *was* Major Stannard. It is his battalion of the —th Cavalry, and they have been out scouting after renegade Cheyennes. Pardon me, madame, I must go forward and see who have boarded the train."

He stopped at his section, and again she followed him, her eyes full of anxiety. He was busy tugging at a flask in his travelling-bag.

"You know them! Do you know—have you heard of any infantry being out? Pardon me for detaining you, but I am very anxious. My husband is Captain Rayner, of Fort Warrener."

"No infantry have been sent, madame, I——have reason to know; at least, none from Warrener."

And with that he hurriedly bowed and left her. The next moment, flask in hand, he was crossing the storm-swept platform and making his way to the head of the train.

"I believe he is an officer," said Mrs. Rayner to her sister. "Who else would be apt to know about the movement of the troops? Did you notice how gentle his manner was?—and he never smiled: he has such a sad face. Yet he can't be an officer, or he would have made himself known to us long ago."

"Is there no name on the satchel?" asked Miss Travers, with pardonable curiosity. "He has an interesting face,—not handsome." And a dreamy look came into her deep eyes. She was thinking, no doubt, of a dark, oval, *distingué* face with raven hair and moustache. The youth in the travelling-suit was not tall, like Steven,—not singularly, romantically handsome, like Steven. Indeed, he was of less interest to her than to her married sister.

Mrs. Rayner could see no name on the satchel,—only two initials; and they revealed very little.

"I have half a mind to peep at the fly-leaf of that book," she said. "He walked just like a soldier; but there isn't anything there to indicate what he is," she continued, with a doubtful glance at the items

scattered about the now vacant section. "Why isn't that porter here? He ought to know who people are."

As though to answer her request, in came the porter, dishevelled and breathless. He made straight for the satchel they had been scrutinizing, and opened it without ceremony. Both ladies regarded this proceeding with natural astonishment, and Mrs. Rayner was about to interfere and question his right to search the luggage of passengers, when the man turned hurriedly towards them, exhibiting a little bundle of handkerchiefs, his broad Ethiopian face clouded with anxiety and concern:

"The gentleman told me to take all his handkerchiefs. We'se got a dozen frozen soldiers in the baggage-car,—some of 'em mighty bad,—and they'se tryin' to make 'em comfortable until they get to the fort."

"Soldiers frozen! Why do you take them in the baggage-car?—such a barn of a place! Why weren't they brought here, where we could make them warm and care for them?" exclaimed Mrs. Rayner, in impulsive indignation.

"Laws, ma'am! never do in the world to bring frozen people into a hot car! Sure to make their ears an' noses drop off, that would! Got to keep 'em in the cold and pile snow around 'em. That gentleman sittin' here,—he knows," he continued: "he's an officer, and him and the doctor's workin' with 'em now."

And Mrs. Rayner, vanquished by a statement of facts well known to her yet forgotten in the first impetuosity of her criticism, relapsed into the silence of temporary defeat.

"He *is* an officer, then," said Miss Travers, presently. "I wonder what he belongs to."

"Not to our regiment, I'm sure. Probably to the cavalry. He knew Major Stannard and other officers whom we passed there."

"Did he speak to them?"

"No: there was no time. We were beyond hearing-distance when he ran to the back door of the car; and there was no time before that. But it's very odd!"

"What's very odd?"

"Why, his conduct. It is so strange that he has not made himself known to us, if he's an officer."

"Probably he doesn't know you—or we—are connected with the army, Kate."

"Oh, yes, he does. The porter knows perfectly well, and I told him just before he left."

"Yes, but he didn't know before that time, did he?"

"He ought to have known," said Mrs. Rayner, uncompromisingly. "At least, he should if he had taken the faintest interest. I mentioned Captain Rayner so that he could not help hearing."

This statement being one that Miss Travers could in no wise contradict,—as it was one, indeed, that Mrs. Rayner could have dispensed with as unnecessary,—the younger lady again betook herself to silence and pulling the kitten's ears.

"Even if he didn't know before," continued her sister, after a pause in which she had apparently been brooding over the indifference of the young man in question, "he ought to have made himself known after

I told him who I was." Another pause. "That's what I did it for," she wound up, conclusively.

"And that's what I thought," said Miss Travers, with a quiet smile. "However, he had no time then: he was hurrying off to see whether any of the soldiers had come on board. He took his flask with him, and apparently was in haste to offer some one a drink. I'm sure that is what papa used to do," she added, as she saw a frown gathering on her sister's face.

"What papa did just after the war—a time when everybody drank—is not at all the proper thing now. Captain Rayner never touches it; and I don't allow it in the house."

"Still, I should think it a very useful article when a lot of frozen and exhausted men are on one's hands," said Miss Travers. "That was but a small flask he had, and I'm sure they will need more."

There came a rush of cold air from the front, and the swinging door blew open ahead of the porter, who was heard banging shut the outer portal. Then he hurried in.

"Can some of you gentlemen oblige me with some whiskey or brandy?" he asked. "We've got some frozen soldiers aboard. Two of 'em are pretty nearly gone."

Two of the card-players dropped their hands and started for their section at once. Before they could rummage in their bags for the required article, Mrs. Rayner's voice was heard: "Take this, porter." And she held forth a little silver flask. "I have more in my trunk if it is needed," she added, while a blush mounted to her forehead as she saw the quizzical smile on her sister's face. "You know I *always* carry it in travelling, Nellie,—in case of accident or illness; and I'm most thankful I have it now."

"Ever so much obliged, ma'am," said the porter, "but this would be only a thimbleful, and I can get a quart bottle of this gentleman."

"Where are they?" said the person thus referred to, as he came down the aisle with a big brown bottle in his hand. "Come, Jim, let's go and see what we can do. One of you gentlemen take my place in the game," he continued, indicating the commercial gents, two of whom, nothing loath, dropped into the vacated seats, while the others pushed on to the front of the train. The porter hesitated one moment.

"Yes, take my flask: I shouldn't feel satisfied without doing something. And please say to the officer that I'm Mrs. Rayner,—Mrs. Captain Rayner, of the infantry,—and ask if there isn't something I can do to help."

"Yes, ma'am; I will, ma'am. Oh, he knows who you are: I done told him last night. He's goin' to Fort Warrener, too." And, touching his cap, away went the porter.

"There! He *did* know all along," said Mrs. Rayner, triumphantly. "It is most extraordinary!"

"Well, is it the proper thing for people in the army to introduce themselves when travelling? How are they to know it will be agreeable?"

"Agreeable! Why, Nellie, it's *always* done,—especially when ladies are travelling without escort, as we are. The commonest civility

should prompt it; and officers always send their cards by the porter the moment they find army ladies are on the train. I don't understand this one at all,—especially——" But here she broke off abruptly.

"Especially what?" asked Miss Nell, with an inspiration of maidenly curiosity.

"Especially nothing. Never mind now." And here the baby began to fidget, and stir about, and stretch forth his chubby hands, and thrust his knuckles in his eyes, and pucker up his face in alarming contortions preparatory to a wail, and, after one or two soothing and tentative sounds of "sh—sh—sh—sh" from the maternal lips, the matron abandoned the attempt to induce a second nap, and picked him up in her arms, where he presently began to take gracious notice of his pretty aunt and the kitten.

Two hours later, just as the porter had notified them that Warrener Station would be in sight in five minutes, the young man of the opposite section returned to the car. He looked tired, very anxious, and his face was paler and the sad expression more pronounced than before. The train-conductor stopped him to speak of some telegrams that had been sent, and both ladies noted the respect which the railway official threw into the tone in which he spoke. The card-players stopped their game and went up to ask after the frozen men. It was not until the whistle was sounding for the station that he stood before them and with a grave and courteous bow held forth Mrs. Rayner's silver flask.

"It was a blessing to one poor fellow at least, and I thank you for him, madame," he said.

"I have been so anxious. I wanted to do something. Did you not get my message, Mr. ——?" she asked, with intentional pause that he might supply the missing name.

"Indeed there was nothing we could ask of you," he answered, totally ignoring the evident invitation. "I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness, but we had abundant help, and you really could not have reached the car in the face of this gale. Good-morning, madame." And with that he raised his fur travelling-cap and quickly turned to his section and busied himself strapping up his various belongings.

"The man must be a woman-hater," she whispered to Miss Travers. "He's going to get out here, too. Who *can* he be?"

There was still a moment before the train would stop at the platform, and she was not to be beaten so easily. Bending partly across the aisle, she spoke again:

"You have been so kind to those poor fellows that I feel sure you must be of the army. I think I told you I am Mrs. Rayner, of Fort Warrener. May we not hope to see you there?"

A deep flush rose to his forehead, suffusing his cheeks, and passed as quickly away. His mouth twitched and trembled. Gazing at him in surprise and trouble, Nellie Travers saw that his face was full of pain and was turning white again. He half choked before he could reply: he spoke low, and yet distinctly, and the words were full of sadness:

"It—it is not probable that we shall meet at all."

And with that he turned away.

II.

Even in the excitement attendant upon their reception at the station neither Mrs. Rayner nor her sister could entirely recover from the surprise and pain which the stranger's singular words had caused. So far from feeling in the least rebuffed, Mrs. Rayner well understood from his manner that not the faintest discourtesy was intended. There was not a symptom of rudeness, not a vestige of irritation or haste, in his tone. Deep embarrassment, inexpressible sadness even, she read in the brief glimpse she had of his paling face. It was all a mystery to her and to the girl seated in silence by her side. Both followed him with their eyes as he hurried away to the rear of the car, and then, with joyous shouts, three or four burly, fur-enveloped men came bursting in the front door, and the two ladies, the baby, and the kitten were pounced upon and surrounded by a group that grew larger every minute. Released finally from the welcoming embrace of her stalwart husband, Mrs. Rayner found time to present the other and younger officers to her sister. As many as half a dozen had followed the captain in his wild rush upon the car, and, while he and his baby boy were resuming acquaintanceship after a separation of many long months, Miss Travers found herself the centre of a circle of young officers who had braved the wintry blizzard in their eagerness to do her proper homage. Her cheeks were aflame with excitement and pleasure, her eyes dancing, and despite the fatigue of her long journey she was looking dangerously pretty, as Captain Rayner glanced for a moment from the baby's wondering eyes, took in the picture like an instantaneous photograph, and then looked again into Mrs. Rayner's smiling face.

"You were wise in providing against possibilities as you did, Kate," he said, with a significant nod of the head. "There are as many as a dozen of them,—or at least there will be when the —th gets back from the field. Stannard is out yet with his battalion."

"Oh, yes: we saw them at a station east of here. They looked frozen to death; and there *are* ever so many of the soldiers frozen. The baggage-car is full of them. Didn't you know it?"

"Not a word of it. We have been here for three mortal hours waiting at the station, and any telegrams must have been sent right out to the fort. The colonel is there, and he would have all arrangements made. Here, Graham! Foster! Mrs. Rayner says there are a lot of frozen cavalrymen forward in the baggage-car. Run ahead and see what is necessary, will you? I'll be there in a minute, as soon as we've got these ladies off the train."

Two of the young gentlemen who had been hovering around Miss Travers took themselves off without a moment's delay. The others remained to help their senior officer. Out into the whirling eddies of snow, bundling them up in the big, warm capes of their regulation overcoats, the officers half led, half carried their precious charges. The captain bore his son and heir; Lieutenant Ross escorted Mrs. Rayner; two others devoted themselves exclusively to Miss Travers; a

fourth picked up the Maltese kitten. Two or three smart, trim-looking infantry soldiers cleared the section of bags and bundles of shawls, and the entire party was soon within the door-way of the waiting-room, where a red-hot coal-stove glowed fierce welcome. Here the ladies were left for a moment, while all the officers again bustled out into the storm and fought their way against the northwest gale until they reached the little crowd gathered about the door-way of the freight-sheds. A stout, short, burly man in beaver overcoat and cap pushed through the knot of half-numbed spectators and approached their leader:

"We have only two ambulances, captain,—that is all there was at the post when the despatch came,—and there are a dozen of these men, besides Dr. Grimes, all more or less crippled, and Grimes has both hands frozen. We must get them out at once. Can we take your wagon?"

"Certainly, doctor. Take anything we have. If the storm holds, tell the driver not to try to come back for us. We can make the ladies comfortable here at the hotel for the night. Some of the officers have to get back for duties this evening. The rest will have to stay. How did they happen to get caught in such a freeze?"

"They couldn't help it. Stannard had chased the Cheyennes across the range, and was ordered to get back to the railway. It was twenty below when they started, and they made three days' chase in that weather; but no one seemed to care so long as they were on the trail. Then came the change of wind, and a driving snow-storm, in which they lost the trail as a matter of course; and then this blizzard struck them on the back-track. Grimes is so exhausted that he could barely hold out until he got here. He says he never could have brought them through from Bluff Siding but for Mr. Hayne: he did everything."

"Mr. Hayne! Was he with them?"

"He was, on the train, and came in at once to offer his services. Grimes says he was invaluable."

"But Mr. Hayne was East on leave: I *know* he was. He was promoted to my company last month,—confound the luck!—and was to have six months' leave before joining. I wish it was six years. Where is he now?" And the captain peered excitedly around from under his shaggy cap. Oddly, too, his face was paling.

"He left as soon as I took charge. I don't know where he's gone; but it's God's mercy he was with these poor fellows. His skill and care have done everything for them. Where did he get his knowledge?"

"I've no idea," said Captain Rayner, gruffly, and in evident ill humor. "He is the last man I expected to see this day or for days to come. Is there anything else I can do, doctor?"

"Nothing, thank you, captain." And the little surgeon hastened back to his charges, followed by some of the younger officers, eager to be of assistance in caring for their disabled comrades. Rayner himself hesitated a moment, then turned about and trudged heavily back along the wind-swept platform. The train had pulled away, and was out of

sight in the whirl of snow over the Western prairies. He went to his own substantial wagon, and shouted to the driver, who sat muffled in buffalo fur on the box,—

"Get around there to the freight-house and report to the doctor. There are a lot of frozen cavalrymen to be taken out to the hospital. Don't try to come back for us to night: we'll stay here in town. Send the quartermaster's team in for the trunks as soon as the storm is over and the road clear. That's all."

Then he rejoined the party at the waiting-room of the station, and Mrs. Rayner noted instantly that all the cheeriness had gone and that a cloud had settled on his face. She was a shrewd observer, and she knew him well. Something more serious than a mishap to a squad of soldiers had brought about the sudden change. He was all gladness, all rejoicing and delight, when he clasped her and his baby boy in his arms but ten minutes before, and now—something had occurred to bring him serious discomfort. She rested her hand on his arm and looked questioningly in his face. He avoided her glance, and quickly began to talk. She saw that he desired to answer no questions just then, and wisely refrained.

Meantime, Miss Travers was chatting blithely with two young gallants who had returned to her side, and who had thrown off their heavy furs and now stood revealed in their becoming undress uniforms. Mr. Ross had gone to look over the rooms which the host of the railway hotel had offered for the use of the party; the baby was yielding to the inevitable and gradually condescending to notice the efforts of Mr. Foster to scrape acquaintance; the kitten, with dainty step, and ears and tail erect, was making a leisurely inspection of the premises, sniffing about the few benches and chairs with which the bare room was burdened, and reconnoitring the door leading to the hall-way with evident desire to extend her researches in that direction. Presently that very door opened, and in came two or three bundles of fur in masculine shape, and with them two shaggy deer-hounds, who darted straight at the kitten. There was a sudden flurry and scatter, a fury of spits and scratching, a yelp of pain from one brute with lacerated nose, a sudden recoil of both hounds, and then a fiery rush through the open door-way in pursuit of puss. After the first gallant instinct of battle her nerve had given out, and she had sought safety in flight.

"Oh, don't let them hurt her!' cried Miss Travers, as she darted into the hall and gazed despairingly up the stairway to the second story, whither the dogs had vanished like a flash. Two of the young officers sped to the rescue and turned the wrong way. Mrs. Rayner and the captain followed her into the hall. A rush of canine feet and an excited chorus of barks and yelps were heard aloft; then a stern voice ordering, "Down, you brutes!" a sudden howl as though in response to a vigorous kick, and an instant later, bearing the kitten, ruffled, terrified, and wildly excited, yet unharmed, there came springing lightly down the steps the young man in civilian dress who was their fellow-traveller on the Pullman. Without a word he gave his prize into the dainty hands outstretched to receive it, and, never stopping an instant, never listening to the eager words of thanks from her pretty lips, he

darted back as quickly as he came, leaving Miss Travers suddenly stricken dumb.

Captain Rayner turned sharply on his heel and stepped back into the waiting-room. Mr. Ross nudged a brother lieutenant and whispered, "By gad! that's awkward for Midas!" The two subalterns who had taken the wrong turn at the top of the stairs reappeared there just as the rescuer shot past them on his way back, and stood staring, first after his disappearing form, and then at each other. Miss Travers, with wonder and relief curiously mingled in her sweet face, clung to her restored kitten and gazed vacantly up the stairs.

Mrs. Rayner looked confusedly from one to the other, quickly noting the constraint in the manner of every officer present and the sudden disappearance of her husband. There was an odd silence for a moment: then she spoke:

"Mr. Ross, do you know that gentleman?"

"I know who he is. Yes."

"Who is he, then?"

"He is your husband's new first lieutenant, Mrs. Rayner. That is Mr. Hayne."

"*That!*—Mr. Hayne?" she exclaimed, growing suddenly pale.

"Certainly, madame. Had you never seen him before?"

"Never; and I expected—I didn't expect to see such a——" And she broke short off, confused and plainly distressed, turned abruptly, and left the hall as had her husband.

III.

The officers of Fort Warrener were assembled, as was the daily morning custom, in the presence of the colonel commanding. It had long been the practice of that veteran soldier to require all his commissioned subordinates to put in an appearance at his office immediately after the ceremony of guard-mounting. He might have nothing to say to them, or he might have a good deal; and he was a man capable of saying a good deal in very few words, and meaning exactly what he said. It was his custom to look up from his writing as each officer entered and respond to the respectful salutation tendered him with an equally punctilious "Good-morning, Captain Gregg," or "Good-morning, Mr. Blake,"—never omitting the mention of the name, unless, as was sometimes tried, a squad of them came in together and made their obeisance as a body. In this event the colonel simply looked each man in the face, as though taking mental note of the individual constituents of the group, and contented himself with a "Good-morning, gentlemen."

When in addition to six troops of his own regiment of cavalry there were sent to the post a major and four companies of infantry, some of the junior officers of the latter organization had suggested to their comrades of the yellow stripes that as the colonel had no roll-call it might be a matter of no great risk to "cut the *matinée*" on some of the fiendishly cold mornings that soon set in; but the experiment was never designedly tried, thanks, possibly, to the frank exposition of his

personal views as expressed by Lieutenant Blake, of the cavalry, who said, "Try it if you are stagnating for want of a sensation, my genial plodder, but not if you value the advice of one who has been there, so to speak. The chief will spot you quicker than he can a missing shoe, —a missing *horse*shoe, Johnny, let me elaborate for your comprehension,—and the next question will be, 'Mr. Bluestrap, did you intentionally absent yourself?' and *then* how will you get out of it?"

The *matinées*, so called, were by no means unpopular features of the daily routine. The officers were permitted to bring their pipes or cigars and take their after-breakfast smoke in the big, roomy office of the commander, just as they were permitted to enjoy the post-prandial whiff when at evening recitation in the same office they sat around the room, chatting in low tones, for half an hour, while the colonel received the reports of his adjutant, the surgeon, and the old and the new officer of the day. Then any matters affecting the discipline or instruction or general interests of the command were brought up; both sides of the question were presented, if question arose; the decision was rendered then and there, and the officers were dismissed for the day with the customary "That's all, gentlemen." They left the office well knowing that only in the event of some sudden emergency would they be called thither again or disturbed in their daily vocations until the same hour on the following morning. Meantime, they must be about their work: drills, if weather permitted; stable-duty, no matter what the weather; garrison courts, boards of survey, the big general court that was perennially dispensing justice at the post, and the long list of minor but none the less exacting demands on the time and attention of the subalterns and company commanders. The colonel was a strict, even severe, disciplinarian, but he was cool, deliberate, and just. He "worked" his officers, and thereby incurred the criticism of a few, but held the respect of all. He had been a splendid cavalry-commander in the field of all others where his sterling qualities were sure to find responsive appreciation in his officers and men,—on active and stirring campaigns against the Indians,—and among his own regiment he knew that deep in their hearts the —th respected and believed in him, even when they growled at garrison exactions which seemed uncalled for. The infantry officers knew less of him as a sterling campaigner, and were not so well pleased with his discipline. It was all right for him to "rout out" every mother's son in the cavalry at reveille, because all the cavalry officers had to go to stables soon afterwards,—that was all they were fit for,—but what on earth was the use of getting them—the infantry—out of their warm beds before sunrise on a wintry morning and having no end of roll-calls and such things through the day, "just to keep them busy"? The real objection —the main objection—to the colonel's system was that it kept a large number of officers, most of whom were educated gentlemen, hammering all day long at an endless routine of trivial duties, allowing actually no time in which they could read, study, or improve their minds; but, as ill luck would have it, the three young gentlemen who decided to present to the colonel this view of the case had been devoting what spare time they could find to a lively game of poker down at "the

store," and their petition for "more time to themselves" brought down a reply from the oracular lips of the commander that became immortal on the frontier and made the petitioners nearly frantic. For a week the trio was the butt of all the wits at Fort Warrener. And yet the entire commissioned force felt that they were being kept at the grindstone because of the frivolity of these few youngsters, and they did not like it. All the same the cavalrymen stuck up for their colonel, and the infantrymen respected him, and the *matinées* were business-like and profitable. They were rarely unpleasant in any feature; but this particular morning—two days after the arrival of Mrs. Rayner and her sister—there had been a scene of somewhat dramatic interest, and the groups of officers in breaking up and going away could discuss nothing else. The colonel had requested one of their number to remain, as he wished to speak to him further; and that man was Lieutenant Hayne.

Seven years had that young gentleman been a second lieutenant of the regiment of infantry a detachment of which was now stationed at Warrener. Only this very winter had promotion come to him; and, of all companies in the regiment, he was gazetted to the first-lieutenancy of Captain Rayner's. For a while the regiment when by itself could talk of little else. Mr. Hayne had spent three or four years in the exile of a little "two-company post" far up in the mountains. Except the officers there stationed, none of his comrades had seen him during that time. No one of them would like to admit that he would care to see him. And yet, when once in a while they got to talking among themselves about him, and the question was sometimes confidentially asked of comrades who came down on leave from that isolated station, "How is Hayne doing?" or, "What is Hayne doing?" the language in which he was referred to grew by degrees far less truculent and confident than it had been when he first went thither. Officers of other regiments rarely spoke to the "Riflers" of Mr. Hayne. Unlike one or two others of their arm of the service, this particular regiment of foot held the affairs of its officers as regimental property in which outsiders had no concern. If they had disagreements, they were kept to themselves; and even in a case which in its day had attracted wide-spread attention the Riflers had long since learned to shun all talk outside. It was evident to other commands that the Hayne affair was a sore point and one on which they preferred silence. And yet it was getting to be whispered around that the Riflers were by no means so unanimous as they had been in their opinion of this very officer. They were becoming divided among themselves; and what complicated matters was the fact that those who felt their views undergoing a reconstruction were compelled to admit that just in proportion as the case of Mr. Hayne rose in their estimation the reputation of another officer was bound to suffer; and that officer was Captain Rayner.

Between these two men not a word had been exchanged for five years,—not a single word since the day when, with ashen face and broken accents, but with stern purpose in every syllable, Lieutenant Hayne, standing in the presence of nearly all the officers of his regiment, had hurled this prophecy in his adversary's teeth: "Though it take me years, I will live it down despite you; and you will wish

to God you had bitten out your perjured tongue before ever you told the lie that wrecked me."

No wonder there was talk, and lots of it, in the "Riflers" and all through the garrison when Rayner's first lieutenant suddenly threw up his commission and retired to the mines he had located in Montana, and Hayne, the "senior second," was promoted to the vacancy. Speculation as to what would be the result was given a temporary rest by the news that War Department orders had granted the subaltern six months' leave,—the first he had sought in as many years. It was known that he had gone East; but hardly had he been away a fortnight when there came the trouble with the Cheyennes at the reservation,—a leap for liberty by some fifty of the band, and an immediate rush of the cavalry in pursuit. There were some bloody atrocities, as there always are. All the troops in the department were ordered to be in readiness for instant service, while the officials eagerly watched the reports to see which way the desperate band would turn; and the next heard of Mr. Hayne was the news that he had thrown up his leave and had hurried out to join his company the moment the Eastern papers told of the trouble. It was all practically settled by the time he reached the department; but the spirit and intent of his action could not be doubted. And now here he was at Warrener. That very morning during the *matinée* he had entered the office unannounced, walked up to the desk of the commander, and, while every voice but his in the room was stilled, he quietly spoke:

"Permit me to introduce myself, colonel,—Mr. Hayne. I desire to relinquish my leave of absence and report for duty."

The colonel quickly arose and extended his hand:

"Mr. Hayne, I am especially glad to see you and to thank you here for all your care and kindness to our men. The doctor tells me that many of them would have had to suffer the loss of noses and ears, even of hands and feet in some cases, but for your attention. Major Stannard will add his thanks to mine when he returns. Take a seat, sir, for the present. You are acquainted with the officers of your own regiment, doubtless. Mr. Billings, introduce Mr. Hayne to ours."

Whereat the adjutant courteously greeted the new-comer, presented a small party of yellow-strapped shoulders, and then drew him into earnest talk about the adventure of the train. It was noticed that Mr. Hayne neither by word nor glance gave the slightest recognition of the presence of the officers of his own regiment, and that they as studiously avoided him. One or two of their number had, indeed, risen and stepped forward, as though to offer him the civil greeting due to one of their own cloth; but it was with evident doubt of the result. They reddened when he met their tentative—which was that of a gentleman—with a cold look of utter repudiation. He did not choose to see them, and, of course, that ended it.

Nor was his greeting hearty among the cavalrymen. There were only a few present, as most of the —th were still out in the field and marching slowly homeward. The introductions were courteous and formal, there was even constraint among some two or three, but there was civility and an evident desire to refer to his services in behalf of

their men. All such attempts, however, Mr. Hayne waved aside by an immediate change of the subject. It was plain that to them, too, he had the manner of a man who was at odds with the world and desired to make no friends.

The colonel quickly noted the general silence and constraint, and resolved to shorten it as much as possible. Dropping his pen, he wheeled around in his chair with determined cheerfulness:

"Mr. Hayne, you will need a day or two to look about before you select quarters and get ready for work, I presume."

"Thank you, colonel. No, sir. I shall move in this afternoon and be on duty to-morrow morning," was the calm reply.

There was an awkward pause for a moment. The officers looked blankly from one to another, and then began craning their necks to search for the post quartermaster, who sat an absorbed listener. Then the colonel spoke again:

"I appreciate your promptness, Mr. Hayne; but have you considered that in choosing quarters according to your rank you will necessarily move somebody out? We are crowded now, and many of your juniors are married, and the ladies will want time to pack."

An anxious silence again. Captain Rayner was gazing at his boot-toes and trying to appear utterly indifferent; others leaned forward, as though eager to hear the answer. A faint smile crossed Mr. Hayne's features: he seemed rather to enjoy the situation:

"I *have* considered, colonel. I shall turn nobody out, and nobody need be incommoded in the least."

"Oh! then you will share quarters with some of the bachelors?" asked the colonel, with evident relief.

"No, sir;" and the answer was stern in tone, though perfectly respectful: "I shall live as I have lived for years,—utterly alone."

One could have heard a pin drop in the office,—even on the matted floor. The colonel half rose:

"Why, Mr. Hayne, there is not a vacant set of quarters in the garrison. You will *have* to move some one out if you decide to live alone."

"There may be no quarters *in* the post, sir, but, if you will permit me, I can live near my company and yet in officers' quarters."

"How so, sir?"

"In the house out there on the edge of the garrison, facing the prairie. It is within stone's-throw of the barracks of Company B, and is exactly like those built for the officers in here along the parade."

"Why, Mr. Hayne, no officers ever lived there. It is utterly out of the way and isolated. I believe it was built for the sutler years ago, but was bought in by the government afterwards.—Who lives there now, Mr. Quartermaster?"

"No one, sir. It is being used as a tailors' shop; half a dozen of the company tailors work there; but I can send them back to their own barracks. The house is in good repair, and, as Mr. Hayne says, exactly like those built for officers' use."

"And you mean you want to live there, alone, Mr. Hayne?"

"I do, sir,—exactly."

The colonel turned sharply to his desk once more. The strained silence continued a moment. Then he faced his officers:

"Mr. Hayne, will you remain a few moments? I wish to speak with you.—Gentlemen, that is all this morning." And so the meeting adjourned.

While many of the cavalry officers strolled into the neighboring club- and reading-room, it was noticed that their comrades of the infantry lost no time at intermediate points, but took the shortest road to the row of brown cottages known as the officers' quarters. The feeling of constraint that had settled upon all was still apparent in the group that entered the club-room, and for a moment no one spoke. There was a general settling into easy-chairs and picking up of newspapers without reference to age or date. No one seemed to want to say anything, and yet every one felt it necessary to have some apparent excuse for becoming absorbed in other matters. This was so evident to Lieutenant Blake that he speedily burst into a laugh,—the first that had been heard,—and when two or three heads popped out from behind their printed screens to inquire into the cause of his mirth, that light-hearted gentleman was seen sprawling his long legs apart and gazing out of the window after the groups of infantrymen.

"What do you see that's so intensely funny?" growled one of the elders among the dragoons.

"Nothing, old mole,—nothing," said Blake, turning suddenly about. "It looks too much like a funeral procession for fun. What I'm chuckling at is the absurdity of our coming in here like so many mutes in weepers. It's none of *our* funeral."

"Strikes me the situation is damned awkward," growled "the mole" again. "Here's a fellow comes in who's cut by his regiment and has placed ours under lasting obligation before he gets inside the post."

"Well, does any man here know the rights and wrongs of the case, anyhow?" said a tall, bearded captain as he threw aside the paper which he had not been reading, and rose impatiently to his feet. "It seems to me, from the little I've heard of Mr. Hayne and the little I've seen, that there is a broad variation between facts and appearances. He looks like a gentleman."

"No one *does* know anything more of the matter than was known at the time of the court-martial five years ago," answered "the mole." "Of course you have heard all about that; and my experience is that when a body of officers and gentlemen find, after due deliberation on the evidence, that another has been guilty of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, the chances are a hundred to one he has been doing something disreputable, to say the least."

"Then why wasn't he dismissed?" queried a young lieutenant. "The law says he must be."

"That's right, Dolly: pull your Ives and Benèt on 'em, and show you know all about military law and courts-martial," said the captain, crushingly. "It's one thing for a court to sentence, and another for the President to approve. Hayne *was* dismissed, so far as a court could do it, but the President remitted the whole thing."

"There was more to it than that, though, and you know it, Buxton," said Blake. "Neither the department commander nor General Sherman thought the evidence conclusive, and they said so,—especially old Gray Fox. And you ask any of these fellows here now whether they believe Hayne was really guilty, and I'll bet you that eight out of ten will flunk at the question."

"And yet they all cut him dead. That's *prima facie* evidence of what they think."

"Cut be blowed! By gad, if any man asked me to testify on oath as to where the cut lay, I should say he had cut *them*. Did you see how he ignored Foster and Graham this morning?"

"I did; and I thought it damned ungentlemanly in him. Those fellows did the proper thing, and he ought to have acknowledged it," broke in a third officer.

"I'm not defending *that* point; the Lord knows he has done nothing to encourage civility with his own people; but there are two sides to every story, and I asked their adjutant last fall, when there was some talk of his company's being sent here, what Hayne's status was, and he told me. There isn't a squarer man or sounder soldier in the army than the adjutant of the Riflers; and he said that it was Hayne's stubborn pride that more than anything else stood in the way of his restoration to social standing. He had made it a rule that every one who was not for him was against him, and refused to admit any man to his society who would not first come to him of his own volition and say he believed him utterly innocent. As that involved the necessity of their looking upon Rayner as either perjured or grossly and persistently mistaken, no one felt called upon to do it. Guilty or innocent, he has lived the life of a Pariah ever since."

"*I* wanted to open out to him, to-day," said Captain Gregg, "but the moment I began to speak of his great kindness to our men he froze as stiff as Mulligan's ear. What was the use? I simply couldn't thaw an icicle. What made him so effective in getting the frost out of them was his capacity for absorbing it into his own system."

"Well, here, gentlemen," said Buxton, impatiently, "we've got to face this thing sooner or later, and may as well do it now. I know Rayner, and like him, and don't believe he's the kind of man to wilfully wrong another. I *don't* know Mr. Hayne, and Mr. Hayne apparently don't want to know me. *I* think that where a man has been convicted of dishonorable—disgraceful conduct and is cut by his whole regiment it is our business to back the regiment, not the man. Now the question is, where shall we draw the line in this case? It's none of our funeral, as Blake says, but ordinarily it would be our duty to call upon this officer. Shall we do it, now that he is in Coventry, or shall we leave him to his own devices?"

"I'll answer for myself, Buxton," said Blake, "and you can do as you please. Except that one thing, and the not unusual frivolities of a youngster that occurred previous to his trial, I understand that his character has been above reproach. So far as I can learn, he is a far more reputable character than I am, and a better officer than most of us. Growl all you want to, comrades mine: 'it's a way we have in the

army,' and I like it. So long as I include myself in these malodorous comparisons, you needn't swear. It is my conviction that the Riflers wouldn't say he was guilty to-day if they hadn't said so five years ago. It is my information that he has paid every cent of the damages, whether he caused them or not, and it is my intention to go and call upon Mr. Hayne as soon as he's settled. I don't propose to influence any man in his action; and excuse me, Buxton, I think you *did*."

The captain looked wrathful. Blake was an oddity, of whom he rather stood in awe, for there was no mistaking the popularity and respect in which he was held in his own regiment. The —th was somewhat remarkable for being emphatically an "outspoken crowd," and for some years, thanks to a leaven of strong and truthful men in whom this trait was pronounced and sustained, it had grown to be the custom of all but a few of the officers to discuss openly and fully all matters of regimental policy and utterly to discountenance covert action of any kind. Blake was thoroughly popular, and generally respected, despite a tendency to rant and rattle on most occasions. Nevertheless, there were signs of dissent as to the line of action he proposed, though it were only for his own guidance.

"And how do you suppose Rayner and the Riflers generally will regard your calling on their black sheep?" asked Buxton, after a pause.

"I don't know," said Blake, more seriously, and with a tone of concern. "I like Rayner, and have found most of those fellows thorough gentlemen and good friends. This will test the question thoroughly. I believe most of them, except of course Rayner, would do the same were they in my place. At all events, I mean to see."

"What are you going to do, Gregg?" asked "the mole," wheeling suddenly on his brother troop-commander.

"I don't know," said Gregg, doubtfully. "I think I'll ask the colonel."

"What do you suppose *he* means to do?"

"I don't know again; but I'll bet we all know as soon as he makes up his mind; and he is making up his mind now,—or he's made it up, for there goes Mr. Hayne, and here comes the orderly. Something's up already."

Every head was turned to the door-way as the orderly's step was heard in the outer hall, and every voice stilled to hear the message, it was so unusual for the commanding officer to send for one of his subordinates after the morning meeting. The soldier tapped at the panel, and at the prompt "Come in" pushed it partly open and stood with one white-gloved hand resting on the knob, the other raised to his cap-visor in salute.

"Lieutenant Blake?" he asked, as he glanced around.

"What is it?" asked Blake, stepping quickly from the window.

"The commanding officer's compliments, sir, and could he see the lieutenant one minute before the court meets?"

"Coming at once," said Blake, as he pushed his way through the chairs, and the orderly faced about and disappeared.

"I'll bet it's about Hayne," was the apparently unanimous senti-

ment as the cavalry party broke up and scattered for the morning's duties. Some waited purposely to hear.

The adjutant alone stood in the colonel's presence as Blake knocked and entered. All others had gone. There was a moment's hesitation, and the colonel paused and looked his man over before he spoke:

"You will excuse my sending for you, Mr. Blake, when I tell you that it is a matter that has to be decided at once. In this case you will consider, too, that I want you to say yes or no exactly as you would to a comrade of your own grade. If you were asked to meet Mr. Hayne at any other house in the garrison than mine, would you desire to accept? You are aware of all the circumstances, the adjutant tells me."

"I am, sir, and have just announced my intention of calling upon him."

"Then will you dine with us this evening to meet Mr. Hayne?"

"I will do so with pleasure, sir."

* * * * * * * * * *

It could hardly have been an hour afterwards when Mrs. Rayner entered the library in her cosey home and found Miss Travers entertaining herself with a book.

"Have you written to Mr. Van Antwerp this morning?" she asked. "I thought that was what you came here for."

"I did mean to, but Mrs. Waldron has been here, and I was interrupted."

"It is fully fifteen minutes since she left, Nellie. You might have written two or three pages already; and you know that all manner of visitors will be coming in by noon."

"I was just thinking over something she told me. I'll write presently."

"Mrs. Waldron is a woman who talks about everything and everybody. I advise you to listen to her no more than you can help. What was it she told you?"

Miss Travers smiled roguishly: "Why should you want to know, Kate, if you disapprove of her revelations?"

"Oh," with visible annoyance, "it is to—I wanted to know so as to let you see that it was something unfounded, as usual."

"She said she had just been told that the colonel was going to give a dinner-party this evening to Mr. Hayne."

"What?"

"She—said—she—had—just—been—told—that—the colonel—was going—to give—a dinner-party—this evening—to Mr.——Hayne."

"Who told her?"

"Kate, I didn't ask."

"Who are invited? None of *ours?*"

"Kate, I don't know."

"Where did she say she had heard it?"

"She didn't say."

Mrs. Rayner paused one moment, irresolute: "Didn't she tell you anything more about it?"

"Nothing, sister mine. Why should you feel such an interest in

what Mrs. Waldron says, if she's such a gossip?" And Miss Travers was evidently having hard work to keep from laughing outright.

"*You* had better write your letter," said her big sister, and flounced suddenly out of the room and up the stairs.

A moment later she was at the parlor door with a wrap thrown over her shoulders: "If Captain Rayner comes in, tell him I want particularly to see him before he goes out again."

"Where are you going, Kate?"

"Oh, just over to Mrs. Waldron's a moment."

IV.

Facing the broad, bleak prairie, separated from it only by a rough, unpainted picket fence, and flanked by uncouth structures of pine, one of which was used as a storehouse for quartermaster's property, the other as the post-trader's depository for skins and furs, there stood the frame cottage which Mr. Hayne had chosen as his home. As has been said, it was precisely like those built for the subaltern officers, so far as material, plan, and dimensions were concerned. The locality made the vast difference which really existed. Theirs stood all in a row, fronting the grassy level of the parade, surrounded by verandas, bordering on a well-kept gravel path and an equally well graded drive. Clear, sparkling water rippled in tiny *acequias* through the front yards of each, and so furnished the moisture needed for the life of various little shrubs and flowering plants. The surroundings were at least "sociable," and there was companionship and jollity, with an occasional tiff to keep things lively. The married officers, as a rule, had chosen their quarters farthest from the entrance-gate and nearest those of the colonel commanding. The bachelors, except the two or three who were old in the service and had "rank" in lieu of encumbrances, were all herded together along the eastern end, a situation that had disadvantages as connected with duties which required the frequent presence of the occupants at the court-martial rooms or at head-quarters, and that was correspondingly far distant from the barracks of the soldiers. It had its recommendations in being convenient to the card-room and billiard-tables at "the store," and in embracing within its limits one house which possessed mysterious interest in the eyes of every woman and most of the men in the garrison: it was said to be haunted.

A sorely-perplexed man was the post quartermaster when the rumor came out from the railway-station that Mr. Hayne had arrived and was coming to report for duty. As a first lieutenant he would have choice of quarters over every second lieutenant in the garrison: there were ten of these young gentlemen, and four of the ten were married. Every set of quarters had its occupants, and Hayne could move in nowhere, unless as occupant of a room or two in the house of some comrade, without first compelling others to move out. This proceeding would lead to vast discomfort, occurring as it would in the dead of winter, and the youngsters were naturally perturbed in spirit,—their wives especially so. What made the prospects infinitely worse was the fact that the cavalry bachelors were already living three in a house: the

only spare rooms were in the quarters of the second lieutenants of the infantry, and they were not on speaking-terms with Mr. Hayne. Everything, therefore, pointed to the probability of his "displacing" a junior, who would in turn displace somebody else, and so they would go tumbling like a row of bricks until the lowest and last was reached. All this would involve no end of worry for the quartermaster, who even under the most favorable circumstances is surè to be the least appreciated and most abused officer under the commandant himself, and that worthy was simply agasp with relief and joy when he heard Mr. Hayne's astonishing announcement that he would take the quarters out on "Prairie Avenue."

It was the talk of the garrison all that day. The ladies, especially, had a good deal to say, because many of the men seemed averse to expressing their views. "Quite the proper thing for Mr. Hayne to do," was the apparent opinion of the majority of the young wives and mothers. As a particularly kind and considerate thing it was not remarked by one of them, though that view of the case went not entirely unrepresented. In choosing to live there Mr. Hayne separated himself from companionship. That, said some of the commentators,—men as well as women,—he simply accepted as the virtue of necessity, and so there was nothing to commend in his action. But Mr. Hayne was said to possess an eye for the picturesque and beautiful. If so, he deliberately condemned himself to the daily contemplation of a treeless barren, streaked in occasional shallows with dingy patches of snow, ornamented only in spots by abandoned old hats, boots, or tin cans blown beyond the jurisdiction of the garrison police-parties. A line of telegraph-poles was all that intervened between his fence and the low-lying hills of the eastern horizon. Southeastward lay the distant roofs and the low, squat buildings of the frontier town; southward the shallow valley of the winding creek in which lay the long line of stables for the cavalry and the great stacks of hay; while the row on which he chose to live—"Prairie Avenue," as it was termed—was far worse at his end of it than at the other. It covered the whole eastern front. The big, brown hospital building stood at the northern end. Then came the quarters of the surgeon and his assistants, then the snug home of the post trader, then the "store" and its scattering appendages, then the entrance-gateway, then a broad vacant space, through which the wind swept like a hurricane, then the little shanty of the trader's fur house and one or two hovel-like structures used by the tailors and cobbler of the adjacent infantry companies. Then came the cottage itself: south of it stood the quartermaster's store-room, back of which lay an extension filled with ordnance stores, then other and similar sheds devoted to commissary supplies, the post butcher-shop, the saddler's shop, then big coal-sheds, and then the brow of the bluff, down which at a steep grade plunged the road to the stables. It was as unprepossessing a place for a home as ever was chosen by a man of education or position; and Mr. Hayne was possessed of both.

In garrison, despite the flat parade, there was a grand expanse of country to be seen stretching away towards the snow-covered Rockies. There was life and the sense of neighborliness to one's kind. Out on

Prairie Avenue all was wintry desolation, except when twice each day the cavalry officers went plodding by on their way to and from the stables, muffled up in their fur caps and coats, and hardly distinguishable from so many bears, much less from one another.

And yet Mr. Hayne smiled not unhappily as he glanced from his eastern window at this group of burly warriors the afternoon succeeding his dinner at the colonel's. He had been busy all day long unpacking books, book-shelves, some few pictures which he loved, and his simple, soldierly outfit of household goods, and getting them into shape. His sole assistant was a Chinese servant, who worked rapidly and well, and who seemed in no wise dismayed by the bleakness of their surroundings. If anything, he was disposed to grin and indulge in high-pitched commentaries in "pidgin English" upon the unaccustomed amount of room. His master had been restricted to two rooms and a kitchen during the two years he had served him. Now they had a house to themselves, and more rooms than they knew what to do with. The quartermaster had sent a detail of men to put up the stoves and move out the rubbish left by the tailors; "Sam" had worked vigorously with soft soap, hot water, and a big mop in sprucing up the rooms; the adjutant had sent a little note during the morning, saying that the colonel would be glad to order him any men he needed to put the quarters in proper shape, and that Captain Rayner had expressed his readiness to send a detail from the company to unload and unpack his boxes, etc., to which Mr. Hayne replied in person that he thanked the commanding officer for his thoughtfulness, but that he had very little to unpack, and needed no assistance beyond that already afforded by the quartermaster's men. Mr. Billings could not help noting that he made no allusion to that part of the letter which spoke of Captain Rayner's offer. It increased his respect for Mr. Hayne's perceptive powers.

While every officer of the infantry battalion was ready to admit that Mr. Hayne had rendered invaluable service to the men of the cavalry regiment, they were not so unanimous in their opinion as to how it should be acknowledged and requited by its officers. No one was prepared for the announcement that the colonel had asked him to dinner and that Blake and Billings were to meet him. Some few of their number thought it going too far, but no one quite coincided with the vehement declaration of Mrs. Rayner that it was an outrage and an affront aimed at the regiment in general and at Captain Rayner in particular. She was an energetic woman when aroused, and there was no doubt of her being very much aroused as she sped from house to house to see what the other ladies thought of it. Rayner's wealth and Mrs. Rayner's qualities had made her an undoubted though not always popular leader in all social matters in the Riflers. She was an authority, so to speak, and one who knew it. Already there had been some points on which she had differed with the colonel's wife, and it was plain to all that it was a difficult thing for her to come down from being *the* authority—the leader of the social element of a garrison—and from the position of second or third importance which she had been accorded when first assigned to the station. There were many, indeed, who asserted

that it was because she found her new position unbearable that she decided on her long visit to the East and departed thither before the Riflers had been at Warrener a month. The colonel's wife had greeted her and her lovely sister with charming grace on their arrival two days previous to the stirring event of the dinner, and every one was looking forward to a probable series of pleasant entertainments by the two households, even while wondering how long the *entente cordiale* would last,—when the colonel's invitation to Mr. Hayne brought on an immediate crisis. It is safe to say that Mrs. Rayner was madder than the captain her husband, who hardly knew how to take it. He was by no means the best liked officer in his regiment, nor the "deepest" and best informed, but he had a native shrewdness which helped him. He noted even before his wife would speak of it to him the gradual dying out of the bitter feeling that had once existed at Hayne's expense. He felt, though it hurt him seriously to make inquiries, that the man whom he had practically crushed and ruined in the long ago was slowly but surely gaining strength even where he would not make friends. Worse than all, he was beginning to doubt the evidence of his own senses as the years receded, and unknown to any soul on earth, even his wife, there was growing up deep down in his heart a gnawing, insidious, ever-festering fear that after all, after all, he might have been mistaken. And yet on the sacred oath of a soldier and a gentleman, against the most searching cross-examination, again and again had he most confidently and positively declared that he had both seen and heard the fatal interview on which the whole case hinged. And as to the exact language employed, he alone of those within earshot had lived to testify for or against the accused: of the five soldiers who stood in that now celebrated group, three were shot to death within the hour. He was growing nervous, irritable, haggard; he was getting to hate the mere mention of the case. The promotion of Hayne to his own company thrilled him with an almost superstitious dismay. *Were* his words coming true? *Was* it the judgment of an offended God that his hideous pride, obstinacy, and old-time hatred of this officer were now to be revenged by daily, hourly contact with the victim of his criminal persecution? He had grown morbidly sensitive to any remarks as to Hayne's having "lived down" the toils in which he had been encircled. Might he not "live down" the ensnarer? He dreaded to see him,—though Rayner was no coward,—and he feared day by day to hear of his restoration to fellowship in the regiment, and yet would have given half his wealth to bring it about, could it but have been accomplished without the dreadful admission, "I was wrong. I was *utterly* wrong." He had grown lavish in hospitality; he had become almost aggressively open-handed to his comrades, and had sought to press money upon men who in no wise needed it. He was as eager to lend as some are to borrow, and his brother officers dubbed him "Midas" not because everything he touched would turn to gold, but because he would intrude his gold upon them at every turn. There were some who borrowed; and these he struggled not to let repay. He seemed to have an insane idea that if he could but get his regimental friends bound to him pecuniarily he could control their opinions and actions. It was making him sick at heart, and it made him in secret

doubly vindictive and bitter against the man he had doomed to years of suffering. This showed out that very morning. Mrs. Rayner had begun to talk, and he turned fiercely upon her:

"Not a word on that subject, Kate, if you love me!—not even the mention of his name! I must have peace in my own house. It is enough to have to talk of it elsewhere."

Talk of it he had to. The major early that morning asked him, as they were going to the *matinée*,—

"Have you seen Hayne yet?"

"Not since he reported on the parade yesterday," was the curt reply.

"Well, I suppose you will send men to help him get those quarters in habitable shape?"

"I will, of course, major, if he ask it. I don't propose sending men to do such work for an officer unless the request come."

"He is entitled to that consideration, Rayner, and I think the men should be sent to him. He is hardly likely to ask."

"Then he is less likely to get them," said the captain, shortly, for, except the post commander, he well knew that no officer could order it to be done. He was angry at the major for interfering. They were old associates, and had entered service almost at the same time, but his friend had the better luck in promotion and was now his battalion commander. Rayner made an excuse of stopping to speak with the officer of the day, and the major went on without him. He was a quiet old soldier: he wanted no disturbance with his troubled friend, and, like a sensible man, he turned the matter over to their common superior, in a very few words, before the arrival of the general audience. It was this that had caused the colonel to turn quietly to Rayner and say, in the most matter-of-fact way,—

"Oh, Captain Rayner, I presume Mr. Hayne will need three or four men to help him get his quarters in shape. I suppose you have already thought to send them?"

And Rayner flushed, and stammered, "They have not gone yet, sir; but I had—thought of it."

Later, when the sergeant sent the required detail he reported to the captain in the company office in five minutes: "The lieutenant's compliments and thanks, but he does not need the men."

The dinner at the colonel's, quiet as it was and with only eight at table, was an affair of almost momentous importance to Mr. Hayne. It was the first thing of the kind he had attended in five years; and though he well know that it was intended by the cavalry commander more especially as a recognition of the services rendered their suffering men, he could not but rejoice in the courtesy and tact with which he was received and entertained. The colonel's wife, the adjutant's, and those of two captains away with the field battalion, were the four ladies who were there to greet him when, escorted by Mr. Blake, he made his appearance. How long—how very long—it seemed to him since he had sat in the presence of refined and attractive women and listened to their gay and animated chat! They seemed all such good friends, they made him so thoroughly at home, and they showed so much tact

and ease, that never once did it seem apparent that they knew of his trouble in his own regiment; and yet there was no actual avoidance of matters in which the Riflers were generally interested. It was mainly of his brief visit to the East, however, that they made him talk,—of the operas and theatres he had attended, the pictures he had seen, the music that was most popular; and when dinner was over their hostess led him to her piano, and he played and sang for them again and again. His voice was soft and sweet, and, though it was uncultivated, he sang with expression and grace, playing with more skill but less feeling and effect than he sang. Music and books had been the solace of lonely years, and he could easily see that he had pleased them with his songs. He went home to the dreary rookery out on Prairie Avenue and laughed at the howling wind. The bare grimy walls and the dim kerosene lamp, even Sam's unmelodious snore in the back room, sent no gloom to his soul. It had been a happy evening. It had cost him a hard struggle to restrain the emotion which he had felt at times; and when he withdrew, soon after the trumpets sounded tattoo, and the ladies fell to discussing him, as women will, there was but one verdict,—his manners were perfect.

But the colonel said more than that. He had found him far better read than any other officer of his age he had ever met; and one and all they expressed the hope that they might see him frequently. No wonder it was of momentous importance to him. It was the opening to a new life. It meant that here at least he had met soldiers and gentlemen and their fair and gracious wives who had welcomed him to their homes, and, though they must have known that a pall of suspicion and crime had overshadowed his past, they believed either that he was innocent of the grievous charge or that his years of exile and suffering had amply atoned. It was a happy evening indeed to him; but there was gloom at Captain Rayner's.

The captain himself had gone out soon after tattoo. He found that the parlor was filled with young visitors of both sexes, and he was in no mood for merriment. Miss Travers was being welcomed to the post in genuine army style, and was evidently enjoying it. Mrs. Rayner was flitting nervously in and out of the parlor with a cloud upon her brow, and for once in her life compelled to preserve temporary silence upon the subject uppermost in her thoughts. She had been forbidden to speak of it to her husband; yet she knew he had gone out again with every probability of needing some one to talk to about the matter. She could not well broach the topic in the parlor, because she was not at all sure how Captain and Mrs. Gregg of the cavalry would take it; and they were still there. She was a loyal wife; her husband's quarrel was hers, and more too; and she was a woman of intuition even keener than that which we so readily accord the sex. She knew, and knew well, that a hideous doubt had been preying for a long time in her husband's heart of hearts, and she knew still better that it would crush him to believe it was even suspected by any one else. Right or wrong, the one thing for her to do, she doubted not, was to maintain the original guilt against all comers, and to lose no opportunity of feeding the flame that consumed Mr. Hayne's record and reputation. He

was guilty,—he must be guilty; and though she was a Christian according to her view of the case,—a pillar of the Church in matters of public charity and picturesque conformity to all the rubric called for in the services, and much that it did not,—she was unrelenting in her condemnation of Mr. Hayne. To those who pointed out that he had made every atonement man could make, she responded with the severity of conscious virtue that there could be no atonement without repentance, and no repentance without humility. Mr. Hayne's whole attitude was that of stubborn pride and resentment; his atonement was that enforced by the unanimous verdict of his comrades; and even if it were so that he had more than made amends for his crime, the rules that held good for ordinary sinners were not applicable to an officer of the army. *He* must be a man above suspicion, incapable of wrong or fraud, and once stained he was forever ineligible as a gentleman. It was a subject on which she waxed declamatory rather too often, and the youngsters of her own regiment wearied of it. As Mr. Foster once expressed it in speaking of this very case, "Mrs. Rayner can talk more charity and show less than any woman I know." So long as her talk was aimed against any lurking tendency of their own to look upon Hayne as a possible martyr, it fell at times on unappreciative ears, and she was quick to see it and to choose her hearers; but here was a new phase,—one that might rouse the latent *esprit de corps* of the Riflers,—and she was bent on striking while the iron was hot. If anything would provoke unanimity of action and sentiment in the regiment, this public recognition by the cavalry, in their very presence, of the man they cut as a criminal, was the thing of all others to do it; and she meant to head the revolt.

Possibly Gregg and his modest helpmeet discovered that there was something she desired to "spring" upon the meeting. The others present were all of the infantry; and when Captain Rayner simply glanced in, spoke hurried good-evenings, and went as hurriedly out again, Gregg was sure of it, and marched his wife away. Then came Mrs. Rayner's opportunity:

"If it were not Captain Rayner's house, I could not have been even civil to Captain Gregg. You heard what he said at the club this morning, I suppose?"

In one form or another, indeed, almost everybody *had* heard. The officers present maintained an embarrassed silence. Miss Travers looked reproachfully at her flushed sister, but to no purpose. At last one of the ladies remarked,—

"Well, of course I heard of it, but—I've heard so many different versions. It seems to have grown somewhat since morning."

"It sounds just like him, however," said Mrs. Rayner, "and I made inquiry before speaking of it. He said he meant to invite Mr. Hayne to his house to-morrow evening, and if the infantry didn't like it they could stay away."

"Well, now, Mrs. Rayner," protested Mr. Foster, "of course none of us heard what he said exactly, but it is my experience that no conversation was ever repeated without being exaggerated, and I've known old Gregg for ever so long, and never heard him say a sharp

thing yet. Why, he's the mildest-mannered fellow in the whole —th Cavalry. He would never get into such a snarl as that would bring about him in five minutes."

"Well, he said he would do just as the colonel did, anyway,—we have that straight from cavalry authority,—and we all know what the colonel has done. He has chosen to honor Mr. Hayne in the presence of the officers who denounce him, and practically defies the opinion of the Riflers."

"But, Mrs. Rayner, I did not understand Gregg's remarks to be what you say, exactly. Blake told me that when asked by somebody whether he was going to call on Mr. Hayne, Gregg simply replied he didn't know,—he would ask the colonel."

"Very well. That means, he proposes to be guided by the colonel, or nothing at all; and Captain Gregg is simply doing what the others will do. They say to us, in so many words, 'We prefer the society of your *bête noire* to your own.' That's the way I look at it," said Mrs. Rayner, in deep excitement.

It was evident that, though none were prepared to endorse so extreme a view, there was a strong feeling that the colonel had put an affront upon the Riflers by his open welcome to Mr. Hayne. He had been exacting before, and had caused a good deal of growling among the officers and comment among the women. They were ready to find fault, and here was strong provocation. Mr. Foster was a youth of unfortunate and unpopular propensities. He should have held his tongue, instead of striving to stem the tide.

"I don't uphold Hayne any more than you do, Mrs. Rayner, but it seems to me this is a case where the colonel has to make some acknowledgment of Mr. Hayne's conduct——"

"Very good. Let him write him a letter, then, thanking him in the name of the regiment, but don't pick him up like this in the face of ours," interrupted one of the juniors, who was seated near Miss Travers (a wise stroke of policy: Mrs. Rayner invited him to breakfast); and there was a chorus of approbation.

"Well, hold on a moment," said Foster. "Hasn't the colonel had every one of us to dinner more or less frequently?"

"Admitted. But what's that to do with it?"

"Hasn't he invariably invited each officer to dine with him in every case where an officer has arrived?"

"Granted. But what then?"

"If he broke the rule or precedent in Mr. Hayne's case would he not practically be saying that he endorsed the views of the court-martial as opposed to those of the department commander, General Sherman, the Secretary of War, the President of the United——"

"Oh, make out your transfer papers, Foster. You ought to be in the cavalry or some other disputatious branch of the service," burst in Mr. Graham.

"I declare, Mr. Foster, I never thought you would abandon your colors," said Mrs. Rayner.

"I haven't, madame, and you've no right to say so," said Foster, indignantly. "I simply hold that any attempt to work up a regimental

row out of this thing will make bad infinitely worse, and I deprecate the whole business."

"I suppose you mean to intimate that Captain Rayner's position and that of the regiment is bad,—all wrong,—that Mr. Hayne has been persecuted," said Mrs. Rayner, with trembling lips and cheeks aflame.

"Mrs. Rayner, you are unjust," said poor Foster. "I ought not to have undertaken to explain or defend the colonel's act, perhaps, but I am not disloyal to my regiment or my colors. What I want is to prevent further trouble; and I know that anything like a concerted resentment of the colonel's invitation will lead to infinite harm."

"*You* may cringe and bow and bear it if you choose; you may humble yourself to such a piece of insolence; but rest assured there are plenty of men and women in the Riflers who won't bear it, Mr. Foster; and for one *I* won't." She had risen to her full height now, and her eyes were blazing. "For his own sake I trust the colonel will omit our names from the next entertainment he gives. Nellie shan't——"

"Oh, think, Mrs. Rayner!" interrupted one of the ladies; "they *must* give her a dinner or a reception."

"Indeed they shall not! I refuse to enter the door of people who have insulted my husband as they have."

"Hush! Listen!" said Mr. Graham, springing towards the door.

There was wondering silence an instant.

"It is nothing but the trumpet sounding taps," said Mrs. Rayner, hurriedly.

But even as she spoke they rose to their feet. Muffled cries were heard, borne in on the night wind,—a shot, then another, down in the valley,—the quick peal of the cavalry trumpet.

"It isn't taps. It's fire!" shouted Graham from the door-way. "Come on!"

V.

Down in the valley south of the post a broad glare was already shooting upward and illumining the sky. One among a dozen little shanties and log houses, the homes of the laundresses of the garrison and collectively known as Sudsville, was a mass of flames. There was a rush of officers across the parade, and the men, answering the alarum of the trumpet and the shots and shouts of the sentries, came tearing from their quarters and plunging down the hill. Among the first on the spot came the young men who were of the party at Captain Rayner's, and Mr. Graham was ahead of them all. It was plain to the most inexperienced eye that there was hardly anything left to save in or about the burning shanty. All efforts must be directed towards preventing the spread of the flames to those adjoining. Half-clad women and children were rushing about, shrieking with fright and excitement, and a few men were engaged in dragging household goods and furniture from those tenements not yet reached by the flames. Fire-apparatus there seemed to be none, though squads of men speedily appeared with ladders, axes, and buckets, brought from the different company quarters, and the arriving officers quickly formed the bucket-lines and water

dipped up from the icy creek began to fly from hand to hand. Before anything like this was fairly under way, a scene of semi-tragic, semi-comic intensity had been enacted in the presence of a rapidly gathering audience. "It was worth more than the price of admission to hear Blake tell it afterwards," said the officers, later.

A tall, angular woman, frantic with excitement and terror, was dancing about in the broad glare of the burning hut, tearing her hair, making wild rushes at the flames from time to time as though intent on dragging out some prized object that was being consumed before her eyes, and all the time keeping up a volley of maledictions and abuse in lavish Hibernian, apparently directed at a cowering object who sat in limp helplessness upon a little heap of fire-wood, swaying from side to side and moaning stupidly through the scorched and grimy hands in which his face was hidden. His clothing was still smoking in places; his hair and beard were singed to the roots; he was evidently seriously injured, and the sympathizing soldiers who had gathered around him after deluging him with snow and water were striving to get him to arise and go with them to the hospital. A little girl, not ten years old, knelt sobbing and terrified by his side. She, too, was scorched and singed, and the soldiers had thrown rough blankets about her; but it was for her father, not herself, she seemed worried to distraction. Some of the women were striving to reassure and comfort her in their homely fashion, bidding her cheer up,—the father was only stupid from drink, and would be all right as soon as "the liquor was off of him." But the little one was beyond consolation so long as he could not or would not speak in answer to her entreaties.

All this time, never pausing for breath, shrieking anathemas on her drunken spouse, reproaches on her frightened child, and invocations to all the blessed saints in heaven to reward the gintleman who had saved her hoarded money,—a smoking packet that she hugged to her breast, —Mrs. Clancy, "the saynior laundress of Company B," as she had long styled herself, was prancing up and down through the gathering crowd, her shrill voice overmastering all other clamor. The vigorous efforts of the men, directed by cool-headed officers, soon beat back the flames that were threatening the neighboring shanties, and levelled to the ground what remained of Private Clancy's home. The fire was extinguished almost as rapidly as it began, but the torrent of Mrs. Clancy's eloquence was still unstemmed. The adjurations of sympathetic sisters to "Howld yer whist," the authoritative admonition of some old sergeant to "Stop your infernal noise," and the half-maudlin yet appealing glances of her suffering lord were all insufficient to check her. It was not until the quiet tones of the colonel were heard that she began to cool down: "We've had enough of this, Mrs. Clancy: be still, now, or we'll have to send you to the hospital in the coal-cart." Mrs. Clancy knew that the colonel was a man of few words, and believed him to be one of less sentiment. She was afraid of him, and concluded it time to cease threats and abuse and come down to the more effective *rôle* of wronged and suffering womanhood,—a feat which she accomplished with the consummate ease of long practice, for the rows in the Clancy household were matters of garrison notoriety. The surgeon, too, had

come, and, after quick examination of Clancy's condition, had directed him to be taken at once to the hospital; and thither his little daughter insisted on following him, despite the efforts of some of the women to detain her and dress her properly.

Before returning to his quarters the colonel desired to know something of the origin of the fire. There was testimony enough and to spare. Every woman in Sudsville had a theory to express, and was eager to be heard at once and to the exclusion of all others. It was not until he had summarily ordered them to go to their homes and not come near him that the colonel managed to get a clear statement from some of the men.

Clancy had been away all the evening, drinking as usual, and Mrs. Clancy was searching about Sudsville as much for sympathy and listeners as for him. Little Kate, who knew her father's haunts, had guided him home, and was striving to get him to his little sleeping-corner before her mother's return, when in his drunken helplessness he fell against the table, overturning the kerosene lamp, and the curtains were all aflame in an instant. It was just after taps—or ten o'clock—when Kate's shrieks aroused the inmates of Sudsville and started the cry of "Fire." The flimsy structure of pine boards burned like so much tinder, and the child and her stupefied father had been dragged forth only in time to save their lives. The little one, after giving the alarm, had rushed again into the house and was tugging at his senseless form when rescue came for both,—none too soon. As for Mrs. Clancy, at the first note of danger she had rushed screaming to the spot, but only in time to see the whole interior ablaze and to howl frantically for some man to save her money,—it was all in the green box under the bed. For husband and child she had for the moment no thought. They were safely out of the fire by the time she got there, and she screamed and fought like a fury against the men who held her back when she would have plunged into the midst of it. It took but a minute for one or two men to burst through the flimsy wall with axes, to rescue the burning box and knock off the lid. It was a sight to see when the contents were handed to her. She knelt, wept, prayed, counted over bill after bill of smoking, steaming greenbacks, until suddenly recalled to her senses by the eager curiosity and the remarks of some of her fellow-women. That she kept money and a good deal of it in her quarters had long been suspected and as fiercely denied; but no one had dreamed of such a sum as was revealed. In her frenzy she had shrieked that the savings of her lifetime were burning,—that there was over three thousand dollars in the box; but she hid her treasure and gasped and stammered and swore she was talking "wild-like." "They was nothing but twos and wans," she vowed; yet there were women there who declared that they had seen tens and twenties as she hurried them through her trembling fingers, and Sudsville gossiped and talked for two hours after she was led away, still moaning and shivering, to the bedside of poor Clancy, who was the miserable cause of it all. The colonel listened to the stories with such patience as could be accorded to witnesses who desired to give prominence to their personal exploits in subduing the flames and rescuing life and property.

It was not until he and the group of officers with him had been engaged some moments in taking testimony that something was elicited which caused a new sensation.

It was not by the united efforts of Sudsville that Clancy and Kate had been dragged from the flames, but by the individual dash and determination of a single man: there was no discrepancy here, for the ten or a dozen who were wildly rushing about the house made no effort to burst into it until a young soldier leaped through their midst into the blazing door-way, was seen to throw a blanket over some object within, and the next minute appeared again, dragging a body through the flames. Then they had sprung to his aid, and between them Kate and "the ould man" were lifted into the open air. A moment later he had handed Mrs. Clancy her packet of money, and—they hadn't seen him since. He was an officer, said they,—a new one. They thought it must be the new lieutenant of Company B; and the colonel looked quickly around and said a few words to his adjutant, who started up the hill forthwith. A group of officers and ladies were standing at the brow of the plateau east of the guard-house, gazing down upon the scene below, and other ladies, with their escorts, had gathered on a little knoll close by the road that led to Prairie Avenue. It was past these that the adjutant walked rapidly away, swinging his hurricane-lamp in his hand.

"Which way now, Billings?" called one of the cavalry officers in the group.

"Over to Mr. Hayne's quarters," he shouted back, never stopping at all.

A silence fell upon the group at mention of the name. They were the ladies from Captain Rayner's and a few of their immediate friends. All eyes followed the twinkling light as it danced away eastward towards the gloomy coal-sheds. Then there was sudden and intense interest. The lamp had come to a stand-still, was deposited on the ground, and by its dim ray the adjutant could be seen bending over a dark object that was half sitting, half reclining at the platform of the shed. Then came a shout, "Come here, some of you." And most of the men ran to the spot.

For a moment not one word was spoken in the watching group: then Miss Travers's voice was heard:

"What can it be? Why do they stop there?"

She felt a sudden hand upon her wrist, and her sister's lips at her ear:

"Come away, Nellie. I want to go home. Come!"

"But, Kate, I must see what it means."

"No: come! It's—it's only some other drunken man, probably. Come!" And she strove to lead her.

But the other ladies were curious too, and all, insensibly, were edging over to the east as though eager to get in sight of the group. The recumbent object had been raised, and was seen to be the dark figure of a man whom the others began slowly to lead away. One of the group came running back to them: it was Mr. Foster.

"Come, ladies: I will escort you home, as the others are busy."

"What is the matter, Mr. Foster?" was asked by half a dozen voices.

"It was Mr. Hayne,—badly burned, I fear. He was trying to get home after having saved poor Clancy."

"You don't say so! Oh, isn't there something we can do? Can't we go that way and be of some help?" was the eager petition of more than one of the ladies.

"Not now. They will have the doctor in a minute. He has not inhaled flame; it is all external; but he was partly blinded and could not find his way. He called to Billings when he heard him coming. I will get you all home and then go back to him. Come!" And, offering his arm to Mrs. Rayner, who was foremost in the direction he wanted to go,—the pathway across the parade,—Mr. Foster led them on. Of course there was eager talk and voluble sympathy; but Mrs. Rayner spoke not a word. The others crowded around him with questions, and her silence passed unnoted except by one.

The moment they were inside the door and alone, Miss Travers turned to her sister: "Kate, what was this man's crime?

VI.

An unusual state of affairs existed at the big hospital for several days: Mrs. Clancy had refused to leave the bedside of her beloved Mike, and was permitted to remain. For a woman who was notorious as a virago and bully, who had beaten little Kate from her babyhood and abused and hammered her Michael until, between her and drink, he was but the wreck of a stalwart manhood, Mrs. Clancy had developed a degree of devotion that was utterly unexpected. In all the dozen years of their marital relations no such trait could be recalled; and yet there had been many an occasion within the past few years when Clancy's condition demanded gentle nursing and close attention,—and never would have got it but for faithful little Kate. The child idolized the broken-down man, and loved him with a tenderness that his weakness seemed but to augment a thousandfold, while it but served to infuriate her mother. In former years, when he was Sergeant Clancy and a fine soldier, many was the time he had intervened to save her from an undeserved thrashing; many a time had he seized her in his strong arms and confronted the furious woman with stern reproof. Between him and the child there had been the tenderest love, for she was all that was left to him of four. In the old days Mrs. Clancy had been the belle of the soldiers' balls, a fine-looking woman, with indomitable powers as a dancer and conversationalist and an envied reputation for outshining all her rivals in dress and adornment. "She would ruin Clancy, that she would," was the unanimous opinion of the soldiers' wives; but he seemed to minister to her extravagance with unfailing good nature for two or three years. He had been prudent, careful of his money, was a war-soldier with big arrears of bounty and, tradition had it, a consummate skill in poker. He was the moneyed man among the sergeants when the dashing relict of a brother non-commissioned officer set her widow's cap for him and won. It did

not take many years for her to wheedle most of his money away; but there was no cessation to the demand, no apparent limit to the supply. Both were growing older, and now it became evident that Mrs. Clancy was the elder of the two, and that the artificiality of her charms could not stand the test of frontier life. No longer sought as the belle of the soldiers' ball-rooms, she aspired to leadership among their wives and families, and was accorded that pre-eminence rather than the fierce battle which was sure to follow any revolt. She became avaricious,—some said miserly,—and Clancy miserable. Then began the downward course. He took to drink soon after his return from a long, hard summer's campaign with the Indians. He lost his sergeant's stripes and went into the ranks. There came a time when the new colonel forbade his re-enlistment in the cavalry regiment in which he had served so many a long year. He had been a brave and devoted soldier. He had a good friend in the infantry, he said, who wouldn't go back on a poor fellow who took a drop too much at times, and, to the surprise of many soldiers,—officers and men,—he was brought to the recruiting officer one day, sober, soldierly, and trimly dressed, and Captain Rayner expressed his desire to have him enlisted for his company; and it was done. Mrs. Clancy was accorded the quarters and rations of a laundress, as was then the custom, and for a time—a very short time—Clancy seemed on the road to promotion to his old grade. The enemy tripped him, aided by the scoldings and abuse of his wife, and he never rallied. Some work was found for him around the quartermaster's shops which saved him from guard-duty or the guard-house. The infantry—officers and men—seemed to feel for the poor, broken-down old fellow and to lay much of his woe to the door of his wife. There was charity for his faults and sympathy for his sorrows, but at last it had come to this. He was lying, sorely injured, in the hospital, and there were times when he was apparently delirious. At such times, said Mrs. Clancy, she alone could manage him; and she urged that no other nurse could do more than excite or irritate him. To the unspeakable grief of little Kate, she, too, was driven from the sufferer's bedside and forbidden to come into the room except when her mother gave permission. Clancy had originally been carried into the general ward with the other patients, but the hospital steward two days afterwards told the surgeon that the patient moaned and cried so at night that the other sick men could not sleep, and offered to give up a little room in his own part of the building. The burly doctor looked surprised at this concession on the part of the steward, who was a man tenacious of every perquisite and one who had made much complaint about the crowded condition of the hospital wards and small rooms ever since the frozen soldiers had come in. All the same the doctor asked for no explanation, but gladly availed himself of the steward's offer. Clancy was moved to this little room adjoining the steward's quarters forthwith, and Mrs. Clancy was satisfied.

Another thing had happened to excite remark and a good deal of it. Nothing short of eternal damnation was Mrs. Clancy's frantic sentence on the head of her unlucky spouse the night of the fire, when she was the central figure of the picture and when hundreds of witnesses to her

words were grouped around. Correspondingly had she called down the blessings of the Holy Virgin and all the saints upon the man who rescued and returned to her that precious packet of money. Everybody heard her, and it was out of the question for her to retract. Nevertheless, from within an hour after Clancy's admission to the hospital not another word of the kind escaped her lips. She was all patience and pity with the injured man, and she shunned all allusion to his preserver and her benefactor. The surgeon had been called away, after doing all in his power to make Clancy comfortable,—he was needed elsewhere,—and only two or three soldiers and a hospital nurse still remained by his bedside, where Mrs. Clancy and little Kate were drying their tears and receiving consolation from the steward's wife. The doctor had mentioned a name as he went away, and it was seen that Clancy was striving to ask a question. Sergeant Nolan bent down:

"Lie quiet, Clancy, me boy: you *must* be quiet, or you'll move the bandages."

"Who did he say was burned? who was he going to see?" gasped the sufferer.

"The new lieutenant, Clancy,—him that pulled ye out. He's a good one, and it's Mrs. Clancy that'll tell ye the same."

"Tell him what?" said she, turning about in sudden interest.

"About the lieutenant's pulling him out of the fire and saving your money."

"Indeed yes! The blessings of all the saints be upon his beautiful head, and——"

"But *who* was it? What was his name, I say?" vehemently interrupted Clancy, half raising himself upon his elbow, and groaning with the effort. "What was his name? I didn't see him."

"Lieutenant Hayne, man."

"Oh, my God!" gasped Clancy, and fell back as though struck a sudden blow.

She sprang to his side: "It's faint he is. Don't answer his questions, sergeant! He's beside himself! Oh, will ye never stop talking to him and lave him in pace? Go away, all of ye's,—go away, I say, or ye'll dhrive him crazy wid yer—— Be quiet, Mike! don't ye spake agin." And she laid a broad red hand upon his face. He only groaned again, and threw his one unbandaged arm across his darkened eyes, as though to hide from sight of all.

From that time on she made no mention of the name that so strangely excited her stricken husband; but the watchers in the hospital the next night declared that in his ravings Clancy kept calling for Lieutenant Hayne.

Stannard's battalion of the cavalry came marching into the post two days after the fire, and created a diversion in the garrison talk, which for one long day had been all of that dramatic incident and its attendant circumstances. In social circles, among the officers and ladies, the main topic was the conduct of Mr. Hayne and the injuries he had sustained as a consequence of his gallant rescue. Among the enlisted men and the denizens of Sudsville the talk was principally of the revelation of Mrs. Clancy's hoard of greenbacks. But in both circles a singular

story was just beginning to creep around, and it was to the effect that Clancy had cried aloud and fainted dead away and that Mrs. Clancy had gone into hysterics when they were told that Lieutenant Hayne was the man to whom the one owed his life and the other her money. Some one met Captain Rayner on the sidewalk the morning Stannard came marching home, and asked him if he had heard the queer story about Clancy. He had not, and it was told him then and there. Rayner did not even attempt to laugh at it or turn it off in any way. He looked dazed, stunned, for a moment, turned very white and old-looking, and, hardly saying good-day to his informant, faced about and went straight to his quarters. He was not among the crowd that gathered to welcome the incoming cavalrymen that bright, crisp, winter day; and that evening Mrs. Rayner went to the hospital to ask what she could do for Clancy and his wife. Captain Rayner always expected her to see that every care and attention was paid to the sick and needy of his company, she explained to the doctor, who could not recall having seen her on a similar errand before, although sick and needy of Company B were not unknown in garrisons where he had served with them. She spent a good while with Mrs. Clancy, whom she had never noticed hitherto, much to the laundress's indignation, and concerning whose conduct she had been known to express herself in terms of extreme disapprobation. But in times of suffering such things are forgotten: Mrs. Rayner was full of sympathy and interest; there was nothing she was not eager to send them, and no thanks were necessary. She could never do too much for the men of her husband's company.

Yet there was a member of her husband's company on whom in his suffering neither she nor the captain saw fit to call. Mr. Hayne's eyes were seriously injured by the flames and heat, and he was now living in darkness. It might be a month, said the doctor, before he could use his eyes again.

"Only think of that poor fellow, all alone out there on that ghastly prairie and unable to read!" was the exclamation of one of the cavalry ladies in Mrs. Rayner's presence; and, as there was an awkward silence and somebody had to break it, Mrs. Rayner responded,—

"If I lived on Prairie Avenue I should consider blindness a blessing."

It was an unfortunate remark. There was strong sympathy developing for Hayne all through the garrison. Mrs. Rayner never meant that it should have any such significance, but inside of twenty-four hours, in course of which her language had been repeated some dozens of times and distorted quite as many, the generally accepted version of the story was that Mrs. Rayner, so far from expressing the faintest sympathy or sorrow for Mr. Hayne's misfortune, so far from expressing the natural gratification which a lady should feel that it was an officer of her regiment who had reached the scene of danger ahead of the cavalry officer of the guard, had said in so many words that Mr. Hayne ought to be thankful that blindness was the worst thing that had come to him.

There was little chance for harmony after that. Many men and some women, of course, refused to believe it, and said they felt confident that she had been misrepresented. Still, all knew by this time that Mrs.

Rayner was bitter against Hayne, and had heard of her denunciation of the colonel's action. So, too, had the colonel heard that she openly declared that she would refuse any invitation extended to her or to her sister which might involve her accepting hospitality at his house. These things *do* get around in most astonishing ways.

Then another complication arose: Hayne, too, was mixing matters. The major commanding the battalion, a man in no wise connected with his misfortunes, had gone to him and urged, with the doctor's full consent, that he should be moved over into and become an inmate of his household in garrison. He had a big, roomy house. His wife earnestly added her entreaties to the major's, but all to no purpose: Mr. Hayne firmly declined. He thanked the major; he rose and bent over the lady's hand and thanked her with a voice that was full of gentleness and gratitude; but he said that he had learned to live in solitude. Sam was accustomed to all his ways, and he had every comfort he needed. His wants were few and simple. She would not be content, and urged him further. He loved reading: surely he would miss his books and would need some one to read aloud to him, and there were so many ladies in the garrison who would be glad to meet at her house and read to him by turns. He loved music, she heard, and there was her piano, and she knew several who would be delighted to come and play for him by the hour. He shook his head, and the bandages hid the tears that came to his smarting eyes. He had made arrangements to be read aloud to, he said; and as for music, that must wait awhile. The kind woman retired dismayed,—she could not understand such obduracy,—and her husband felt rebuffed. Stannard of the cavalry, too, came in with his gentle wife. She was loved throughout the regiment for her kindliness and grace of mind, as well as for her devotion to the sick and suffering in the old days of the Indian wars, and Stannard had made a similar proffer and been similarly refused, and he had gone away indignant. He thought Mr. Hayne too bumptious to live; but he bore no malice, and his wrath was soon over. Many of the cavalry officers called in person and tendered their services, and were very civilly received, but all offers were positively declined. Just what the infantry officers should do was a momentous question. That they could no longer hold aloof was a matter that was quickly settled, and three of their number went through the chill gloaming of the wintry eve and sent in their cards by Sam, who ushered them into the cheerless front room, while one of their number followed to the doorway which led to the room in rear, in which, still confined to his bed by the doctor's advice, the injured officer was lying. It was Mr. Ross who went to the door and cleared his throat and stood in the presence of the man to whom, more than five years before, he had refused his hand. The others listened anxiously:

"Mr. Hayne, this is Ross. I come with Foster and Graham to say how deeply we regret your injuries, and to tender our sympathy and our services."

There was a dead silence for a moment. Foster and Graham stood with hearts that beat unaccountably hard, looking at each other in perplexity. Would he never reply?

The answer came at last,—a question:

"To what injuries do you allude, Mr. Ross?"

Even in the twilight they could see the sudden flush of the Scotchman's cheek. He was a blunt fellow, but, as the senior, had been chosen spokesman for the three. The abrupt question staggered him. It was a second or two before he could collect himself.

"I mean the injuries at the fire," he replied.

This time, no answer whatever. It was growing too painful. Ross looked in bewilderment at the bandaged face, and again broke the silence:

"We hope you won't deny us the right to be of service, Mr. Hayne. If there is anything we can do that you need, or would like——" hesitatingly.

"You have nothing further to say?" asked the calm voice from the pillow.

"I—don't know what else we *can* say," faltered Ross, after an instant's pause.

The answer came, firm and prompt, but icily cool:

"Then there is nothing that you can do."

And the three took their departure, sore at heart.

There were others of the infantry who had purposed going to see Hayne that evening, but the story of Ross's experience put an end to it all. It was plain that even now Mr. Hayne made the condition of the faintest advance from his regimental comrades a full confession of error. He would have no less.

That evening the colonel sat by his bedside and had an earnest talk. He ventured to expostulate with the invalid on his refusal to go to the major's or to Stannard's. He could have so many comforts and delicacies there that would be impossible here. He did not refer to edibles and drinkables alone, he said, with a smile; but Hayne's patient face gave no sign of relenting. He heard the colonel through, and then said, slowly and firmly,—

"I have not acted hastily, sir: I appreciate their kindness, and am not ungrateful. Five years ago my whole life was changed. From that time to this I have done without a host of things that used to be indispensable, and have abjured them one and all for a single luxury that I cannot live without,—the luxury of utter independence,—the joy of knowing that I owe no man anything,—the blessing of being beholden to no one on earth for a single service I cannot pay for. It is the one luxury left me."

VII.

It was a clear winter's evening, sharply cold, about a week after the fire, when, as Mrs. Rayner came down the stairway equipped for a walk, and was passing the parlor door without stopping, Miss Travers caught sight of and called to her,—

"Are you going walking, Kate? *Do* wait a moment, and I'll go with you."

Any one in the hall could have shared the author's privilege and

seen the expression of annoyance and confusion that appeared on Mrs. Rayner's face:

"I thought you *were* out. Did not Mr. Graham take you walking?"

"He did; but we wandered into Mrs. Waldron's, and she and the major begged us to stay, and we had some music, and then the first call sounded for retreat, and Mr. Graham had to go, so he brought me home. I've had no walk, and need exercise."

"But I don't like you to be out after sunset. That cough of yours——"

"Disappeared the day after I got here, Kate, and there hasn't been a vestige of it since. This high, dry climate put an end to it. No, I'll be ready in one minute more. Do wait."

Mrs. Rayner's hand was turning the knob while her sister was hurrying to the front door and drawing on her heavy jacket as she did so. The former faced her impatiently:

"I don't think you are at all courteous to your visitors. You know just as well as I do that Mr. Foster or Mr. Royce or some other of those young officers are sure to be in just at this hour. You really are very thoughtless, Nellie."

Miss Travers stopped short in her preparations.

"Kate Rayner," she began, impressively, "it was only night before last that you rebuked me for sitting here with Mr. Blake at this very hour, and asked me how I supposed Mr. Van Antwerp would like it. Now you——"

"Fudge! I cannot stay and listen to such talk. If you *must* go, wait a few minutes until I get back. I—I want to make a short call. Then I'll take you."

"So do I want to make a short call,—over at the doctor's; and you are going right to the hospital, are you not?"

"How do you know I am?" asked Mrs. Rayner, reddening.

"You *do* go there every evening, it seems to me."

"I don't. Who told you I did?"

"Several people mentioned your kindness and attention to the Clancys, Kate. I have heard it from many sources."

"I wish people would mind their own affairs," wailed Mrs. Rayner, peevishly.

"So do I, Kate; but they never have, and never will, especially with an engaged girl. I have more to complain of than you, but it doesn't make me forlorn, whereas you look fearfully worried about nothing."

"Who says I'm worried?" asked Mrs. Rayner, with sudden vehemence.

"You look worried, Kate, and haven't been at all like yourself for several days. Now, *why* shouldn't I go to the hospital with you? Why do you try to hide your going from me? Don't you know that I must have heard the strange stories that are flitting about the garrison? Haven't I asked you to set me right if I have been told a wrong one? Kate, you are fretting yourself to death about something, and the captain looks worried and ill. I cannot but think it has some connection with the case of Mr. Hayne. Why should the Clancys——"

"You have no right to think any such thing," answered her sister, angrily. "We have suffered too much at his hands or on his account already, and I never want to hear such words from your lips. It would outrage Captain Rayner to hear that my sister, to whom he has given a home and a welcome, was linking herself with those who side with that—that thief."

"Kate! Oh, how *can* you use such words? How dare you speak so of an officer? You would not tell me what he was accused of; but I tell you that if it be theft I don't believe it,—and no one else——"

There was a sudden footfall on the porch without, and a quick, sharp, imperative knock at the door. Mrs. Rayner fled back along the hall towards the dining-room. Miss Travers, hesitating but a second, opened the door.

It was the soldier telegraph-operator, with a despatch-envelope in his hand:

"It is for Mrs. Rayner, miss, and an answer is expected. Shall I wait?"

Mrs. Rayner came hastily forward from her place of refuge within the dining-room, took the envelope without a word, and passed into the parlor, where, standing beneath the lamp, she tore it open, glanced anxiously at its contents, then threw it with an exclamation of peevish indignation upon the table:

"You'll have to answer for yourself, Nellie. I cannot straighten your affairs and mine too." And with that she was going; but Miss Travers called her back.

The message simply read, "No letter in four days. Is anything wrong? Answer paid," and was addressed to Mrs. Rayner and signed S. V. A.

"I think you have been extremely neglectful," said Mrs. Rayner, who had turned and now stood watching the rising color and impatiently tapping foot of her younger sister. Miss Travers bit her lips and compressed them hard. There was an evident struggle in her mind between a desire to make an impulsive and sweeping reply and an effort to control herself.

"Will you answer a quiet question or two?" she finally asked.

"You know perfectly well I will," was the sisterly rejoinder.

"How long does it take a letter to go from here to New York?"

"Five or six days, I suppose."

Miss Travers stepped to the door, briefly told the soldier there was no answer, thanked him for waiting, and returned.

"You are not going to reply?" asked Mrs. Rayner, in amaze.

"*I* am not; and I inferred *you* did not intend to. Now another question. How many days have we been here?"

"Eight or nine,—nine, it is."

"You saw me post a letter to Mr. Van Antwerp as we left the Missouri, did you not?"

"Yes. At least I suppose so."

"I wrote again as soon as we got settled here, three days after that, did I not?"

"You said you did," replied Mrs. Rayner, ungraciously.

"And you, Kate, when you are yourself have been prompt to declare that I say what I mean. Very probably it may have been four days from the time that letter from the transfer reached Wall Street to the time the next one could get to him from here, even had I written the night we arrived. Possibly you forget that you forbade my doing so, and sent me to bed early. Mr. Van Antwerp has simply failed to remember that I had gone several hundred miles farther west; and even had I written on the train twice a day, the letters would not have reached him uninterruptedly. By this time he is beginning to get them fast enough. And as for you, Kate, you are quite as unjust as he. It augurs badly for my future peace; and—I am learning two lessons here, Kate."

"What two, pray?"

"That he can be foolishly unreliable in estimating a woman."

"And the other?"

"That you may be persistently unreliable in your judgment of a man."

Verily, for a young woman with a sweet, girlish face, whom we saw but a week agone twitching a kitten's ears and saying little or nothing, Miss Travers was displaying unexpected fighting qualities. For a moment, Mrs. Rayner glared at her in tremulous indignation and dismay.

"You—you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" was her eventual outbreak.

But to this there was no reply. Miss Travers moved quietly to the door-way, turned and looked her angry sister in the eye, and said,—

"I shall give up the walk, and will go to my room. Excuse me to any visitors this evening."

"You are not going to write to him now, when you are angry, I hope?"

"I shall not write to him until to-morrow, but when I do I shall tell him this, Kate: that if he desire my confidence he will address his complaints and inquiries to me. If I am old enough to be engaged to him, in your opinion, I am equally old enough to attend to such details as these, in my own."

Mrs. Rayner stood one moment as though astounded; then she flew to the door and relieved her surcharged bosom as follows, "Well, I pity the man you marry, whether you are lucky enough to keep this one or not!" and flounced indignantly out of the house.

When Captain Rayner came in, half an hour afterwards, the parlor was deserted. He was looking worn and dispirited. Finding no one on the ground-floor, he went to the foot of the stairs, and called,—

"Kate."

A door opened above: "Kate has gone out, captain."

"Do you know where, Nellie?"

"Over to the hospital, I think; though I cannot say."

She heard him sigh deeply, move irresolutely about the hall for a moment, then turn and go out.

At his gate he found two figures dimly visible in the gathering darkness: they had stopped on hearing his footstep. One was an officer in uniform, wrapped in heavy overcoat, with a fur cap, and a bandage over his eyes. The other was a Chinese servant, and it was the latter who asked,—

"This Maje Waldlon's?"

"No," said he, hastily. "Major Waldron's is the third door beyond."

At the sound of his voice the officer quickly started, but spoke in low, measured tone: "Straight ahead, Sam." And the Chinaman led him on.

Rayner stood a moment watching them, bitter thoughts coursing through his mind. Mr. Hayne was evidently sufficiently recovered to be up and out for air, and now he was being invited again. This time it was his old comrade Waldron who honored him. Probably it was another dinner. Little by little, at this rate, the time would soon come when Mr. Hayne would be asked everywhere and he and his correspondingly dropped. He turned miserably away, and went back to the billiard-rooms at the store. When Mrs. Rayner rang her bell for tea that evening he had not reappeared, and she sent a messenger for him.

It was a brilliant moonlit evening. A strong prairie gale had begun to blow from the northwest, and was banging shutters and whirling pebbles at a furious rate. At the sound of the trumpets wailing tattoo a brace of young officers calling on the ladies took their leave. The captain had retired to his den, or study, where he shut himself up a good deal of late, and thither Mrs. Rayner followed him and closed the door after her. Throwing a cloak over her shoulders, Miss Travers stepped out on the piazza and gazed in delight upon the moonlit panorama,—the snow-covered summits to the south and west, the rolling expanse of upland prairie between, the rough outlines of the foot-hills softened in the silvery light, the dark shadows of the barracks across the parade, the twinkling lights of the sergeants as they took their stations, the soldierly forms of the officers hastening to their companies far across the frozen level. Suddenly she became aware of two forms coming down the walk. They issued from Major Waldron's quarters, and the door closed behind them. One was a young officer; the other, she speedily made out, a Chinese servant, who was guiding his master. She knew the pair in an instant, and her first impulse was to retire. Then she reflected that he could not see, and she wanted to look: so she stayed. They had almost reached her gate, when a wild blast whirled the officer's cape about his ears and sent some sheets of music flying across the road. Leaving his master at the fence, the Chinaman sped in pursuit; and the next thing she noted was that Mr. Hayne's fur cap was blown from his head and that he was groping for it helplessly.

There was no one to call, no one to assist. She hesitated one minute, looked anxiously around, then sprang to the gate, picked up the cap, pulled it well down over the bandaged eyes, seized the young officer firmly by the arm, drew him within the gate, and led him to the

shelter of the piazza. Once out of the fury of the gale, she could hear his question, "Did you get it all, Sam?"

"Not yet," she answered. Oh, how she longed for a deep contralto! "He is coming. He will be here in a moment."

"I am so sorry to have been a trouble to you," he began again, vaguely.

"You are no trouble to me. I'm glad I was where I happened to see you and could help."

He spoke no more for a minute. She stood gazing at all that was visible of the pale face below the darkened eyes. It was so clear-cut, so refined in feature, and the lips under the sweeping blonde moustache, though set and compressed, were delicate and pink. He turned his head eagerly towards the parade; but Sam was still far away. The music had scattered, and was leading him a lively dance.

"Isn't my servant coming?" he asked, constrainedly. "I fear I'm keeping you. Please do not wait. He will find me here. You were going somewhere."

"No,—unless it was here." She was trembling now. "Please be patient, Mr.—Mr. Hayne. Sam may be a minute or two yet, and here you are out of the wind."

Again she looked in his face. He was listening eagerly to her words, as though striving to "place" her voice. *Could* she be mistaken? Was he, too, not trembling? Beyond all doubt his lips were quivering now.

"May I not know who it is that led me here?" he asked, gently.

She hesitated, hardly knowing how to tell him.

"Try and guess," she laughed, nervously. "But you couldn't. You do not know my name. It is my good fortune, Mr. Hayne. You —you saved my kitten; I—your cap."

There was no mistaking his start. Beyond doubt he had winced as though stung, and was now striving to grope his way to the railing. She divined his purpose in an instant, and her slender hand was laid pleadingly yet firmly on his arm.

"Mr. Hayne, don't go. Don't think of going. Stay here until Sam comes. He's coming now," she faltered.

"Is this Captain Rayner's house?" he asked, hoarse and low.

"No matter whose it is! I welcome you here. You shall not go," she cried, impulsively, and both little hands were tugging at his arm. He had found the railing, and was pulling himself towards the gate, but her words, her clinging hands, were too persuasive.

"I cannot realize this," he said. "I do not understand——"

"Do not try to understand it, Mr. Hayne. If I am only a girl, I have a right to think for myself. My father was a soldier,—I am Nellie Travers,—and if he were alive I know well he would have had me do just what I have done this night. Now won't you stay?"

And light was beaming in through his darkened eyes and gladdening his soul with a rapture he had not known for years. One instant he seized and clasped her hand. "May God bless you!" was all he whispered, but so softly that even she did not hear him. He bowed low over the slender white hand, and stayed.

VIII.

March had come,—the month of gale and bluster, sleet and storm, in almost every section of our broad domain,—and March at Warrener was to the full as blustering and conscienceless as in New England. There were a few days of sunshine during the first week; then came a fortnight of raging snow-storms. The cavalry troops, officers and men, went about their stable-duties as usual, but, except for roll-call on the porch of the barracks and for guard-mounting over at the guard-house, all military exercise seemed suspended. This meant livelier times for the ladies, however, as the officers were enabled to devote just so many more hours a day to their entertainment. There were two or three hops a week over in the big assembly-room, and there was some talk of getting up a german in honor of Miss Travers, but the strained relations existing between Mrs. Rayner and the ladies of other families at the post made the matter difficult of accomplishment. There were bright little luncheon-, dinner-, and tea-parties, where the young officers and the younger ladies met every day; and, besides all this, despite the fact that Mrs. Rayner had at first shown a fixed determination to discuss the rights and wrongs of "the Hayne affair," as it was now beginning to be termed, with all comers who belonged to the Riflers, it had grown to be a very general thing for the youngsters to drop in at her house at all hours of the day; but that was because there were attractions there which outweighed her combativeness. Then Rayner himself overheard some comments on the mistake she was making, and forbade her discussing the subject with the officers even of her own regiment. She was indignant, and demanded a reason. He would name no names, but told her that he had heard enough to convince him she was doing him more harm than good, and, if anything, contributing to the turn of the tide in Hayne's favor. Then she felt outraged and utterly misjudged. It was a critical time for her, and if deprived of the use of her main weapon of offence and defence the battle was sure to go amiss. Sorely against her inclination, she obeyed her lord, for, as has been said, she was a loyal wife, and for the time being the baby became the recipient of her undivided attention.

True to her declaration, she behaved so coldly and with such marked distance of manner to the colonel and his wife when they met in society immediately after the dinner that the colonel quietly told his wife she need not give either dinner or reception in honor of Mrs. Rayner's return. He would like to have her do something to welcome Miss Travers, for he thought the girl had much of her father in her. He knew him well in the old days before and during the war, and liked him. He liked her looks and her sweet, unaffected, cheery manner. He liked the contrast between her and her sister; for Miss Travers had listened in silence to her sister's exposition of what her manner should be to the colonel and his wife, and when they met she was bright and winsome. The colonel stood and talked with her about her father, whom she could remember only vaguely, but of whom she never tired

of hearing; and that night Mrs. Rayner rebuked her severely for her disloyalty to the captain, who had given her a home.

But when Mrs. Rayner heard that Major and Mrs. Waldron had invited Mr. Hayne to dine with them, and had invited to meet him two of the cavalry officers and their wives, she was incensed beyond measure. She and Mrs. Waldron had a brief talk, as a result of which Mrs. Rayner refused to speak to Mrs. Waldron at the evening party given by Mrs. Stannard in honor of her and her sister. It was this that brought on the crisis. Whatever was said between the men was not told. Major Waldron and Captain Rayner had a long consultation, and they took no one into their confidence; but Mrs. Rayner obeyed her husband, went to Mrs. Waldron and apologized for her rudeness, and then went with her sister and returned the call of the colonel's wife; but she chose a bright afternoon, when she knew well the lady was not at home.

She retired from the contest, apparently, as has been said, and took much Christian consolation to herself from the fact that at so great a sacrifice she was obeying her husband and doing the duty she owed to him. In very truth, however, the contest was withdrawn from her by the fact that for a week or more after his evening at the Waldrons' Mr. Hayne did not reappear in garrison, and she had no cause to talk about him. Officers visiting the house avoided mention of his name. Ladies of the cavalry regiment calling upon Mrs. Rayner and Miss Travers occasionally spoke of him and his devotion to the men and his bravery at the fire, but rather as though they meant in a general way to compliment the Riflers, not Mr. Hayne; and so she heard little of the man whose existence was so sore a trial to her. What she would have said, what she would have thought, had she known of the meeting between him and her guarded Nellie, is beyond us to describe; but she never dreamed of such a thing, and Miss Travers never dreamed of telling her,—for the present, at least. Fortunately—or unfortunately—for the latter, it was not so much of her relations with Mr. Hayne as of her relations with half a dozen young bachelors that Mrs. Rayner speedily felt herself compelled to complain. It was a blessed relief to the elder sister. Her surcharged spirit was in sore need of an escape-valve. She was ready to boil over in the mental ebullition consequent upon Mr. Hayne's reception at the post, and with all the pent-up irritability which that episode had generated she could not have contained herself and slept. But here Miss Travers came to her relief. Her beauty, her winsome ways, her unqualified delight in everything that was soldierly, speedily rendered her vastly attractive to all the young officers in garrison. Graham and Foster of the infantry, Merton, Webster, and Royce of the cavalry, haunted the house at all manner of hours, and the captain bade them welcome and urged them to come oftener and stay later, and told Mrs. Rayner he wanted some kind of a supper or collation every night. He set before his guests a good deal of wine, and drank a good deal more himself than he had ever been known to do before, and they were keeping very late hours at Rayner's, for, said the captain, "I don't care if Nellie *is* engaged: she shall have a good time while she's here; and if the boys know all about it,—goodness knows

you've told them often enough, Kate,—and they don't mind it, why, it's nobody's business,—here, at least."

What Mr. Van Antwerp might think or care was another matter. Rayner never saw him, and did not know him. He rather resented it that Van Antwerp had never written to him and asked his consent. As Mrs. Rayner's husband and Nellie's brother-in-law, it seemed to him he stood *in loco parentis;* but Mrs. Rayner managed the whole thing herself, and he was not even consulted. If anything, he rather enjoyed the contemplation of Van Antwerp's fidgety frame of mind as described to him by Mrs. Rayner about the time it became apparent to her that Nellie was enjoying the attentions of which she was so general an object, and that the captain was sitting up later and drinking more wine than was good for him. She was aware that the very number of Nell's admirers would probably prevent her becoming entangled with any one of them, but she needed something to scold about, and eagerly pitched upon this. She knew well that she could not comfort her husband in the anxiety that was gnawing at his heart-strings, but she was jealous of comfort that might come to him from any other source, and the Lethe of wine and jolly companionship she dreaded most of all. Long, long before, she had induced him to promise that he would never offer the young officers spirits in his house. She would not prohibit wine at table, she said; but she never thought of there coming a time when he himself would seek consolation in the glass and make up in quantity what it lacked in alcoholic strength. He was impatient of all reproof now, and would listen to no talk; but Nellie was years her junior,—more years than she would admit except at such times as these, when she meant to admonish; and Nellie had to take it.

Two weeks after their arrival at Warrener the burden of Mrs. Rayner's song—morn, noon, and night—was, "What would Mr. Van Antwerp say if he could but see this or hear that?"

Can any reader recall an instance where the cause of an absent lover was benefited by the ceaseless warning in a woman's ear, "Remember, you're engaged"? The hero of antiquity who caused himself to be attended by a shadowing slave whispering ever and only, "Remember, thou art mortal," is a fine figure to contemplate—at this remote date. He, we are told, admitted the need, submitted to the infliction. But lives there a woman who will admit that she needs any instruction as to what her conduct should be when the lord of her heart is away? Lives there a woman who, submitting, because she cannot escape, to the constant reminder, "Thou art engaged," will not resent it in her heart of hearts and possibly revenge herself on the one alone whom she holds at her mercy? Left to herself,—to her generosity, her conscience, her innate tenderness,—the cause of the absent one will plead for itself, and, if it have even faint foundation, hold its own. "With the best intentions in the world," many an excellent cause has been ruined by the injudicious urgings of a mother; but to talk an engaged girl into mutiny, rely on the infallibility of two women,—a married sister or a maiden aunt.

Just what Mr. Van Antwerp would have said could he have seen the situation at Warrener is perhaps impossible to predict. Just what

he did say without seeing was, perhaps, the most unwise thing he could have thought of: he urged Mrs. Rayner to keep reminding Nellie of her promise. His had not been a life of unmixed joy. He was now nearly thirty-five, and desperately in love with a pretty girl who had simply bewitched him during the previous summer. It was not easy to approach her then, he found, for her sister kept vigilant guard; but, once satisfied of his high connections, his wealth, and his social standing, the door was opened, and he was something more than welcomed, said the gossips at the Surf House. What his past history had been, where and how his life had been spent, were matters of less consequence, apparently, than what he was now. He had been wild at college, as other boys had been, she learned; he had tried the cattle-business in the West, she was told; but there had been a quarrel with his father, a reconciliation, a devoted mother, a long sojourn abroad,—Heidelberg, —a sudden summons to return, the death of the father, and then the management of a valuable estate fell to the son. There were other children, brother and sisters, three in all, but Steven was the first-born and the mother's glory. She was with him at the sea-side, and the first thing that moved Nellie Travers to like him was his devotion to that white-haired woman who seemed so happy in his care. Between that mother and Mrs. Rayner there had speedily sprung up an acquaintance. She had vastly admired Nellie, and during the first fortnight of their visit to the Surf House had shown her many attentions. The illness of a daughter called her away, and Mrs. Rayner announced that she, too, was going elsewhere, when Mr. Van Antwerp himself returned, and Mrs. Rayner decided it was so late in the season that they had better remain until it was time to go to town. In October they spent a fortnight in the city, staying at the Westminster, and he was assiduous in his attentions, taking them everywhere, and lavishing flowers and bonbons upon Nell. Then Mrs. Van Antwerp invited them to visit her at her own comfortable, old-fashioned house down-town, and Mrs. Rayner was eager to accept, but Nellie said no; she would not do it: she could not accept Mr. Van Antwerp; she liked, admired, and was attracted by him, but she felt that love him she did not. He was devoted, but had tact and patience, and Mrs. Rayner at last yielded to her demand and took her off in October to spend some time in the interior of the State with relations of their mother, and there, frequently, came Mr. Van Antwerp to see her and to urge his suit. They were to have gone to Warrener immediately after the holidays, but January came and Nellie had not surrendered. Another week in the city, a long talk with the devoted old mother whose heart was so wrapped up in her son's happiness and whose arms seemed yearning to enfold the lovely girl, and Nellie was conquered. If not fully convinced of her love for Mr. Van Antwerp, she was more than half in love with his mother. Her promise was given, and then she seemed eager to get back to the frontier which she had known and loved as a child. "I want to see the mountains, the snow-peaks, the great rolling prairies, once more," she said; and he had to consent. Man never urged more importunately than he that the wedding should come off that very winter; but Nellie once more

said no; she could not and would not listen to an earlier date than the summer to come.

No one on earth knew with what sore foreboding and misery he let her go. It was something that Mrs. Rayner could not help remarking, —his unconquerable aversion to every mention of the army and of his own slight experience on the frontier. He would not talk of it even with Nellie, who was an enthusiast and had spent two years of her girlhood almost under the shadow of Laramie Peak and loved the mere mention of the Wyoming streams and valleys. In her husband's name Mrs. Rayner had urged him to drop his business early in the spring and come to them for a visit. He declared it was utterly impossible. Every moment of his time must be given to the settling of estate affairs, so that he could be a free man in the summer. He meant to take his bride abroad immediately and spend a year or more in Europe. These were details which were industriously circulated by Mrs. Rayner and speedily became garrison property. It seemed to the men that in bringing her sister there engaged she had violated all precedent to begin with, and in this instance, at least, there was general complaint. Mr. Blake said it reminded him of his early boyhood, when they used to take him to the great toy-stores at Christmas: "Look all you like, long for it as much as you please, but don't touch." Merton and Royce, of the cavalry, said it was simply a challenge to any better fellow to cut in and cut out the Knickerbocker; and, to do them justice, they did their best to carry out their theory. Both they and their comrades of the Riflers were assiduous in their attentions to Miss Travers, and other ladies, less favored, made acrimonious comment in consequence. A maiden sister of one of the veteran captains in the —th, a damsel whose stern asceticism of character was reflected in her features and grimly illustrated in her dress, was moved to censure of her more attractive neighbor. "If I had given my heart to a gentleman," said she, and her manner was indicative of the long struggle which such a bestowal would cost both him and her, "nothing on earth would induce *me* to accept attentions from any one else, not if *he* were millions of miles away."

But Nellie Travers was "accepting attentions" with laughing grace and enjoying the society of these young fellows immensely. The house would have been gloomy without her and "the boys," Rayner was prompt to admit, for he was ill at ease and sorely worried, while his inflammable Kate was fuming over the situation of her husband's affairs. Under ordinary circumstances she would have seen very little to object to so long as Nellie showed no preference for any one of her admirers at Warrener, and unless peevish or perturbed in spirit would have made little allusion to it. As matters stood, however, she was in a most querulous and excitable mood: she could not rail at the real cause of her misery, and so, woman-like, she was thankful for a pretext for uncorking the vials of her wrath on somebody or something else. If the young matrons in garrison who, with the two or three visiting maidens, were disposed to rebel at Miss Nell's apparent absorption of all the available cavaliers at the post, and call her a too lucky girl, could but have heard Mrs. Rayner's nightly tirades and hourly rebukes, they might have

realized that here, as elsewhere, the rose had its stinging thorns. As for Miss Travers, she confounded her sister by taking it all very submissively and attempting no defence. Possibly conscience was telling her that she deserved more than she was getting, or than she would be likely to get until her sister heard of the adventure with Mr. Hayne.

"By the way," said Mr. Royce one evening as they were stamping off the snow and removing their heavy wraps in Rayner's hall-way after a series of garrison calls, "Mrs. Waldron says she expects you to play for her to-morrow afternoon, Miss Travers. Of course it will be my luck to be at stables."

"You hear better music every afternoon than I can give you, Mr. Royce."

"Where, pray?" asked Mrs. Rayner, turning quickly upon them.

Mr. Royce hesitated, and—with shame be it said—allowed Miss Travers to meet the question:

"At Mr. Hayne's, Kate."

There was the same awkward silence that always followed the mention of Hayne's name. Mrs. Rayner looked annoyed. It was evident that she wanted more information,—wanted to ask, but was restrained. Royce determined to be outspoken.

"Several of us have got quite in the way of stopping there on our way from afternoon stables," he said, very quietly. "Mr. Hayne has his piano now, and has nearly recovered the full use of his eyes. He plays well."

Mrs. Rayner turned about once more, and, without saying so much as good-night, went heavily up-stairs, leaving her escort to share with Mr. Royce such welcome as the captain was ready to accord them. If forbidden to talk on the subject nearest her heart, she would not speak at all. She would have banged her door, but that would have waked baby. It stung her to the quick to know that the cavalry officers were daily visitors at Mr. Hayne's quarters. It was little comfort to know that the infantry officers did not go, for she and they both knew that, except Major Waldron, no one of their number was welcome under that roof unless he would voluntarily come forward and say, "I believe you innocent." She felt that but for the stand made by Hayne himself most of their number would have received him into comradeship again by this time, and she could hardly sleep that night from thinking over what she had heard.

But could she have seen the figure that was slinking in the snow at the rear door of Hayne's quarters that very evening, peering into the lighted rooms, and at last, after many an irresolute turn, knocking timidly for admission and then hiding behind the corner of the shed until Sam came and poked his pig-tailed head out into the wintry darkness in wondering effort to find the visitor, she would not have slept at all.

It was poor Clancy, once more mooning about the garrison and up to his old tricks. Clancy had been drinking; but he wanted to know, "could he spake with the lieutenant?"

IX.

"I have been reading over your letter of Thursday last, dear Steven," wrote Miss Travers, "and there is much that I feel I ought to answer. You and Kate are very much of a mind about the 'temptations' with which I am surrounded; but you are far more imaginative than she is, and far more courteous. There is so much about your letter that touches me deeply that I want to be frank and fair in my reply. I have been dancing all this evening, was out at dinner before that, and have made many calls this afternoon; but, tired as I am, my letter must be written, for to-morrow will be but the repetition of to-day. Is it that I am cold and utterly heartless that I can sit and write so calmly in reply to your fervent and appealing letter? Ah, Steven, it is what may be said of me; but, if cold and heartless to you, I have certainly given no man at this garrison the faintest reason to think that he has inspired any greater interest in him. They are all kind, all very attentive. I have told you how well Mr. Royce dances and Mr. Merton rides and Mr. Foster reads and talks. They entertain me vastly, and I *do* like it. More than this, Steven, I am pleased with their evident admiration,—not alone pleased and proud that they should admire me who am pledged to you,—not that alone, I frankly confess, but because it in itself is pleasant. It pleases *me*. Very possibly it is because I am vain.

"And yet, though my hours are constantly occupied, though they are here from morning till night, no one of them is more attentive than another. There are five or six who come daily. There are some who do not come at all. Am I a wretch, Steven? There are two or three that do not call who I wish *would* call. I would like to know them.

"Yet they know—they could not help it, with Kate here, and I never forget—that I am your promised wife. Steven, do you not sometimes forget the conditions of that promise? Even now, again and again do I not repeat to you that you ought to release me and free yourself? Of course your impulse will be to say my heart is changing,—that I have seen others whom I like better. No, I have seen no one I like as well. But *is* 'like' what you deserve,—what you ask? and is it not all I have ever been able to promise you? Steven, bear me witness, for Kate is bitterly unjust to me at times, I told you again and again last summer and fall that I did not love you and ought not to think of being your wife. Yet, poor, homeless, dependent as I am, how strong was the temptation to say yes to your plea! You know that I did not and would not until time and again your sweet mother, whom I *do* love, and Kate, who had been a mother to me, both declared that *that* should make no difference: the love would come: the happiest marriages the world over were those in which the girl respected the man of her choice: love would come, and come speedily, when once she was his wife. You yourself declared you could wait in patience,—you would woo and win by and by. Only promise to be your wife before returning to the frontier, and you would be content. Steven, *are* you content? You know you are not; you know you are unhappy; and

it is all, not because I am growing to love some one else, but because I am not growing to love you. Heaven knows I want to love you; for so long as you hold me to it my promise is sacred and shall be kept. More than that, if you say that it is your will that I seclude myself from these attentions, give up dancing, give up rides, drives, walks, and even receiving visits, here, so be it. I will obey. But write this to me, Steven,—not to Kate. I am too proud to ask her to show me the letters I know she has received from you,—and there are some she has not shown me,—but I cannot understand a man's complaining to other persons of the conduct of the woman who is, or is to be, his wife. Forgive me if I pain you: sometimes even to myself I seem old and strange. I have lived so much alone, have had to think and do for myself so many years while Kate has been away, that perhaps I'm not 'like other girls;' but the respect I feel for you would be injured if I thought you strove to guide or govern me through others; and of one thing be sure, Steven, *I must honor and respect and look up to the man I marry*, love or no love.

"Once you said it would kill you if you believed I could be false to you. If by that you meant that, having given my promise to you to be your wife at some future time, I must school myself to love you, and will be considered false if love do not come at my bidding or yours, I say to you solemnly, release me now. I may not love, but I cannot and will not deceive you, even by simulating love that does not exist. Suppose that love were to be kindled in my heart. Suppose I were to learn to care for some one here. You would be the first one to know it; for I would tell you as soon as I knew it myself. *Then* what could I hope for,—or you? Surely you would not want to marry a girl who loved another man. But is it much better to marry one who feels that she does not love you? Think of it, Steven: I am very lonely, very far from happy, very wretched over Kate's evident trouble and all the sorrow I am bringing you and yours; but have I misled or deceived you in any one thing? Once only has a word been spoken or a scene occurred that you could perhaps have objected to. I told you the whole thing in my letter of Sunday last, and why I had not told Kate. We have not met since that night, Mr. Hayne and I, and may not; but he is a man whose story excites my profound pity and sorrow, and he is one of the two or three I feel that I would like to see more of. Is this being false to you or to my promise? If so, Steven, you cannot say that I have not given you the whole truth.

"It is very late at night,—one o'clock,—and Kate is not yet asleep, and the captain is still down-stairs, reading. He is not looking well at all, and Kate is sorely anxious about him. It was his evidence that brought years of ostracism and misery upon Lieutenant Hayne, and there are vague indications that in his own regiment the officers are beginning to believe that possibly he was not the guilty man. The cavalry officers, of course, say nothing to us on the subject, and I have never heard the full story. If he has been, as is suggested, the victim of a scoundrel, and Captain Rayner was at fault in his evidence, no punishment on earth could be too great for the villain who planned his ruin, and no remorse could atone for Captain Rayner's share. I

never saw so sad a face on mortal man as Mr. Hayne's. Steven Van Antwerp, I wish I *were* a man! I would trace that mystery to the bitter end.

"This is a strange letter to send to—to you; but I am a strange girl. Already I am more than expecting you to write and release me unconditionally; and you *ought* to do it. I do not say I want it.

"Faithfully, at least, yours,

"NELLIE.

"P.S.—Should you write to Kate, you are not to tell her, remember, of my meeting with Mr. Hayne. Of course I am anxious to have your reply to that letter; but it will be five days yet."

An odd letter, indeed, for a girl not yet twenty, and not of a hope-inspiring character; but when it reached Mr. Van Antwerp he did not pale in reading it: his face was ghastly before he began. If anything, he seemed relieved by some passages, though rejoiced by none. Then he took from an inner pocket the letter that had reached him a few days previous, and all alone in his room, late at night, he read it over again, threw it upon the table at which he was sitting, then, with passionate abandonment, buried his face in his arms and groaned aloud in anguish.

Two days after writing this letter Miss Travers was so unfortunate as to hear a conversation in the dining-room which was not intended for her ears. She had gone to her room immediately after breakfast, and, glancing from her window, saw that the officers were just going to head-quarters for the daily *matinée*. For half or three-quarters of an hour, therefore, there could be no probable interruption; and she decided to write an answer to the letter which came from Mr. Van Antwerp the previous afternoon. A bright fire was burning in the old-fashioned stove with which frontier quarters are warmed if not ornamented, and she perched her little, slippered feet upon the hearth, took her portfolio in her lap, and began. Mrs. Rayner was in the nursery, absorbed with the baby and the nurse, when a servant came and announced that "a lady was in the kitchen" and wanted to speak with the lady of the house. Mrs. Rayner promptly responded that she was busy and couldn't be disturbed, and wondered who it could be that came to her kitchen to see her.

"Can I be of service, Kate?" called Miss Travers. "I will run down, if you say so."

"I wish you would," was the reply; and Miss Travers put aside her writing. "Didn't she give any name?" asked Mrs. Rayner of the Abigail, who was standing with her head just visible at the stairway, it being one of the unconquerable tenets of frontier domestics to go no farther than is absolutely necessary in conveying messages of any kind; and this damsel, though new to the neighborhood, was native and to the manner born in all the tricks of the trade.

"She said you knew her name, ma'am. She's the lady from the hospital."

"Here, Jane, take the baby! Never mind, Nellie: I must go!" And Mrs. Rayner started with surprising alacrity; but as she passed her door Miss Travers saw the look of deep anxiety on her face.

A moment later she heard voices at the front door,—a party of ladies who were going to spend the morning with the colonel's wife at some "Dorcas society" work which many of them had embraced with enthusiasm. "I want to see Miss Travers, just a minute," she heard a voice say, and recognized the pleasant tones of Mrs. Curtis, the young wife of one of the infantry officers: so a second time she put aside her writing, and then ran down to the front door. Mrs. Curtis merely wanted to remind her that she must be sure to come and spend the afternoon with her and bring her music, and was dismayed to find that Miss Travers could not come before stable-call: she had an engagement. "Of course: I might have known it: you are besieged every hour. Well, can you come to-morrow? Do." And, to-morrow being settled upon, and despite the fact that several of the party waiting on the sidewalk looked cold and impatient, Mrs. Curtis found it impossible to tear herself away until certain utterly irrelevant matters had been lightly touched upon and lingeringly abandoned. The officers were just beginning to pour forth from head-quarters when the group of ladies finally got under way again and Miss Travers closed the door. It was now useless to return to her letter: so she strolled into the parlor just as she heard her sister's voice at the kitchen door:

"Come right in here, Mrs. Clancy. Now, quick, what is it?"

And from the dining-room came the answer, hurried, half whispered, and mysterious,—

"He's been drinkin' ever since he got out of hospital, ma'am, an' he's worse than ever about Loot'nant Hayne. It's mischief he'll be doin', ma'am: he's crazy-like——"

"Mrs. Clancy, you *must* watch him. You—— Hush!"

And here she stopped short, for, in astonishment at what she had already heard, and in her instant effort to hear no more of what was so evidently not intended for her, Miss Travers hurried from the parlor, the swish of her skirts telling loudly of her presence there. She went again to her room. What could it mean? Why was her proud, imperious Kate holding secret interviews with this coarse and vulgar woman? What concern was it of hers that Clancy should be "worse" about Mr. Hayne? It could not mean that the mischief he would do was mischief *to* the man who had saved his life and his property. That was out of the question. It could not mean that the poor, broken-down, drunken fellow had the means in his power of further harming a man who had already been made to suffer so much. Indeed, Kate's very exclamation, the very tone in which she spoke, showed a distress of mind that arose from no fear for one whom she hated as she hated Hayne. Her anxiety was personal. It was for her husband and for herself she feared, or woman's tone and tongue never yet revealed a secret. Nellie Travers stood in her room stunned and bewildered, yet trying hard to recall and put together all the scattered stories and rumors that had reached her about the strange conduct of Clancy after he was taken to the hospital,—especially about his heart-broken wail when told that it was Lieutenant Hayne who had rescued him and little Kate from hideous death. Somewhere, somehow, this man was connected with the mystery which encircled the long-hidden truth in

Hayne's trouble. Could it be possible that he did not realize it, and that her sister had discovered it? Could it be——oh, heaven! *no!*—could it be that Kate was standing between that lonely and friendless man and the revelation that would set him right? She could not believe it of her! She would not believe it of her sister! And yet what did Kate mean by charging Mrs. Clancy to watch him,—that drunken husband? What could it mean but that she was striving to prevent Mr. Hayne's ever hearing the truth? She longed to learn more and solve the riddle once and for all. They were still earnestly talking together down in the dining-room; but she could not listen. Kate knew her so well that she had not closed the door leading into the hall, though both she and the laundress of Company B had lowered their voices. It was disgraceful at best, thought Miss Travers, it was beneath her sister, that she should hold any private conversation with a woman of that class. Confidences with such were contamination. She half determined to rush down-stairs and put an end to it, but was saved the scene: fresh young voices, hearty ringing tones, and the stamp of heavy boot-heels were heard at the door; and as Rayner entered, ushering in Royce and Graham, Mrs. Rayner and the laundress fled once more to the kitchen.

When the sisters found themselves alone again, it was late in the evening. Mrs. Rayner came to Nellie's room and talked on various topics for some little time, watching narrowly her sister's face. The young girl hardly spoke at all. It was evident to the elder what her thoughts must be.

"I suppose you think I should explain Mrs. Clancy's agitation and mysterious conduct, Nellie," she finally and suddenly said.

"I do not want you to tell me anything, Kate, that you yourself do not wish to tell me. You understand, of course, how I happened to be there?"

"Oh, certainly. I wasn't thinking of that. You couldn't help hearing; but you must have thought it queer,—her being so agitated, I mean."

No answer.

"Didn't you?"

"I wasn't thinking of her at all."

"What did you think, then?" half defiantly, yet trembling and growing white.

"I thought it strange that *you* should be talking with her in such a way."

"She was worried about her husband,—his drinking so much,—and came to consult me."

"Why should she—and you—show such consternation at his connection with the name of Mr. Hayne?"

"Nellie, *that* matter is one you know I cannot bear to talk of." ("Very recently only," thought the younger.) "You once asked me to tell you what Mr. Hayne's crime had been, and I answered that until you could hear the whole story you could not understand the matter at all. We are both worried about Clancy. He is not himself; he is wild and imaginative when he's drinking. He has some strange fancies since the fire, and he thinks he ought to do something to help

the officer because he helped him, and his head is full of Police Gazette stories, utterly without foundation, and he thinks he can tell who the real culprits were,—or something of that kind. It is utter nonsense. I have investigated the whole thing,—heard the whole story. It is the trashiest, most impossible thing you ever dreamed of, and would only make fearful trouble if Mr. Hayne got hold of it."

"Why?"

"*Why?* Because he is naturally vengeful and embittered, and he would seize on any pretext to make it unpleasant for the officers who brought about his trial."

"Do you mean that what Clancy says in any way affects them?" asked Nell, with quickening pulse and color.

"It might, if there were a word of truth in it; but it is the maudlin dream of a liquor-maddened brain. Mrs. Clancy and I both know that what he says is utterly impossible. Indeed, he tells no two stories alike."

"Has he told you anything?"

"No; but she tells me everything."

"How do you know she tells the truth?"

"Nellie! Why should she deceive me? I have done everything for them."

"I distrust her all the same; and you had better be warned in time. If he has any theory, no matter how crack-brained, or if he knows anything about the case and wants to tell it to Mr. Hayne, you are the last woman on earth who should stand in the way."

"Upon my word, Nellie Travers, this is going too far! One would think you believed I wish to stand in the way of that young man's restoration."

"Kate, if you lift a hand or speak one word to prevent Clancy's seeing Mr. Hayne and telling him everything he knows, you will make me believe—precisely that."

Captain Rayner heard sobbing and lamentation on the bedroom floor when he came in a few moments after. Going aloft, he found Miss Travers's door closed as usual, and his wife in voluble distress of mind. He could only learn that she and Nellie had had a falling out, and that Nell had behaved in a most unjust, disrespectful, and outrageous way. She declined to give further particulars.

X.

Miss Travers had other reasons for wanting to be alone. That very afternoon, just after stable-call, she found herself unoccupied for the time being, and decided to go over and see Mrs. Waldron a few moments. The servant admitted her to the little army parlor, and informed her that Mrs. Waldron had stepped out, but would be home directly. A bright wood fire was blazing on the hearth and throwing flickering lights and shadows about the cosey room. The piano stood invitingly open, and on the rack were some waltzes of Strauss she remembered having heard the cavalry band play a night or two previous. Seating herself, she began to try them, and speedily became interested.

Her back being to the door, she did not notice that another visitor was soon ushered in,—a man. She continued slowly "picking out" the melody, for the light was growing dim and it was with difficulty that she could distinguish the notes. Twice she essayed a somewhat complicated passage, became entangled, bent down and closely scanned the music, began again, once more became involved, exclaimed impatiently, "How absurd!" and whirled about on the piano-stool, to find herself facing Mr. Hayne.

Now that the bandage was removed from his eyes it was no such easy matter to meet him. Her sweet face flushed instantly as he bent low and spoke her name.

"I had no idea any one was here. It quite startled me," she said, as she withdrew from his the hand she had mechanically extended to him.

"It was my hope not to interrupt you," he answered, in the low, gentle voice she had marked before. "You helped me when my music was all adrift the other night: may I not help you find some of this?"

"I wish you *would* play, Mr. Hayne."

"I will play for you gladly, Miss Travers, but waltz-music is not my forte. Let me see what else there is here." And he began turning over the sheets on the stand.

"Are your eyes well enough to read music,—especially in such a dim light?" she asked, with evident sympathy.

"My eyes are doing very well,—better than my fingers, in fact,—and, as I rarely play by note after I once learn a piece, the eyes make no difference. What music do you like? I merely looked at this collection thinking you might see something that pleased you."

"Mrs. Ray told me you played Rubinstein so well,—that melody in F, for one."

"Did Mrs. Ray speak of that?"—his face brightening. "I'm glad they found anything to enjoy in my music."

"'They' found a great deal, Mr. Hayne, and there are a number who are envious of their good fortune,—I, for one," she answered, blithely. "Now play for me. Mrs. Waldron will be here in a minute."

And when Mrs. Waldron came in, a little later, Miss Travers, seated in an easy-chair and looking intently into the blaze, was listening as intently to the soft, rich melodies that Mr. Hayne was playing. The firelight was flickering on her shining hair; one slender white hand was toying with the locket that hung at her throat, the other gently tapping on the arm of the chair in unison with the music. And Mr. Hayne, seated in the shadow, bent slightly over the key-board, absorbed in his pleasant task, and playing as though all his soul were thrilling in his finger-tips. Mrs. Waldron stood in silence at the door-way, watching the unconscious pair with an odd yet comforted expression in her eyes. At last, in one long, sweet, sighing chord, the melody softly died away, and Mr. Hayne slowly turned and looked upon the girl. She seemed to have wandered off into dream-land. For a moment there was no sound; then, with a little shivering sigh, she roused herself.

"It is simply exquisite," she said. "You have given me such a treat!"

"I'm glad. I owe you a great deal more pleasure, Miss Travers."

Mrs. Waldron hereat elevated her eyebrows. She would have slipped away if she could, but she was a woman of substance, and as solid in flesh as she was warm of heart. She did the only thing left to her,—came cordially forward to welcome her two visitors and express her delight that Miss Travers could have an opportunity of hearing Mr. Hayne play. She soon succeeded in starting him again, and shortly thereafter managed to slip out unnoticed. When he turned around a few minutes afterwards, she had vanished.

"Why, I had no idea she was gone!" exclaimed Miss Travers; and then the color mounted to her brow. He must think her extremely absorbed in his playing; and so indeed she was.

"You are very fond of music, I see," he said, at a venture.

"Yes, very; but I play very little and very badly. Pardon me, Mr. Hayne, but you have played many years, have you not?"

"Not so very many; but——there have been many in which I had little else to do but practise."

She reddened again. It was so unlike him, she thought, to refer to that matter in speaking to her. He seemed to read her:

"I speak of it only that I may say to you again what I began just before Mrs. Waldron came. You gave me no opportunity to thank you the other night, and I may not have another. You do not know what an event in my life that meeting with you was; and you cannot know how I have gone over your words again and again. Forgive me the embarrassment I see I cause you, Miss Travers. We are so unlikely to meet at all that you can afford to indulge me this once." He was smiling so gravely, sadly, now, and had risen and was standing by her as she sat there in the big easy-chair, still gazing into the fire, but listening for his every word. "In five long years I have heard no words from a woman's lips that gave me such joy and comfort as those you spoke so hurriedly and without premeditation. Only those who know anything of what my past has been could form any idea of the emotion with which I heard you. If I could not have seen you to say how—how I thanked you, I would have had to write. This explains what I said awhile ago: I owe you more pleasure than I can ever give. But one thing was certain: I could not bear the idea that you should not be told, and by me, how grateful your words were to me,—how grateful I was to you. Again, may God bless you!"

And now he turned abruptly away, awaiting no answer, reseated himself at the piano and retouched the keys. But, though she sat motionless and speechless, she knew that he had been trembling so violently and that his hands were still so tremulous he could play no more. It was some minutes that they sat thus, neither speaking; and as he regained his self-control and began to attempt some simple little melodies, Mrs. Waldron returned:

"How very domestic you look, young people! Shall we light the lamps?"

"I've stayed too long already," said Miss Travers, springing to her

feet. "Kate does not know I'm out, and will be wondering what has become of her sister." She laughed nervously. "Thank you so much for the music, Mr. Hayne!—Forgive my running off so suddenly, won't you, Mrs. Waldron?" she asked, pleadingly, as she put her hand in hers; and as her hostess reassured her she bent and kissed the girl's flushed cheek. Mr. Hayne was still standing patiently by the centre-table. Once more she turned, and caught his eye, flushed, half hesitated, then held out her hand with quick impulse:

"Good-evening, Mr. Hayne. I *shall* hope to hear you play again."

And, with pulses throbbing, and cheeks that still burned, she ran quickly down the line to Captain Rayner's quarters, and was up-stairs and in her room in another minute.

This was an interview she would find it hard to tell to Kate. But told it was, partially, and she was sitting now, late at night, hearing through her closed door her sister's unmusical lamentations,—hearing still ringing in her ears the reproaches heaped upon her when that sister was quietly told that she and Mr. Hayne had met twice. And now she was sitting there, true to herself and her resolution, telling Mr. Van Antwerp all about it. Can one conjecture the sensations with which he received and read that letter?

Mr. Hayne, too, was having a wakeful night. He had gone to Mrs. Waldron's to pay a dinner-call, with the result just told. He had one or two other visits to make among the cavalry households in garrison, but, after a few moments' chat with Mrs. Waldron, he decided that he preferred going home. Sam had to call three times before Mr. Hayne obeyed the summons to dinner that evening. The sun was going down behind the great range to the southwest, and the trumpets were pealing "retreat" on the frosty air, but Hayne's curtains were drawn, and he was sitting before his fire, deep in thought, hearing nothing. The doctor came in soon after he finished his solitary dinner, chatted with him awhile, and smoked away at his pipe. He wanted to talk with Hayne about some especial matter, and he found it hard work to begin. The more he saw of his patient the better he liked him: he was interested in him, and had been making inquiries. Without his pipe he found himself uninspired.

"Mr. Hayne, if you will permit, I'll fill up and blow another cloud. Didn't you ever smoke?"

"Yes. I was very fond of my cigar six or seven years ago."

"And you gave it up?" asked the doctor, tugging away at the strings of his little tobacco-pouch.

"I gave up everything that was not an absolute necessity," said Hayne, calmly. "Until I could get free of a big load there was no comfort in anything. After that was gone I had no more use for such old friends than certain other old friends seemed to have for me. It was a mutual cut."

"To the best of my belief, you were the gainer in both cases," said the doctor, gruffly. "The longer I live the more I agree with Carlyle: the men we live and move with are mostly fools."

Hayne's face was as grave and quiet as ever:

"These are hard lessons to learn, doctor. I presume few young

fellows thought more of human friendship than I did the first two years I was in service."

"Hayne," said the doctor, "sometimes I have thought you did not want to talk about this matter to any soul on earth; but I am speaking from no empty curiosity now. If you forbid it, I shall not intrude; but there are some questions that, since knowing you, and believing in you as I unquestionably do, I would like to ask. You seem bent on returning to duty here to-morrow, though you might stay on sick report ten days yet; and I want to stand between you and the possibility of annoyance and trouble if I can."

"You are kind, and I appreciate it, doctor; but do you think that the colonel is a man who will be apt to let me suffer injustice at the hands of any one here?"

"I don't, indeed. He is full of sympathy for you, and I know he means you shall have fair play; but a company commander has as many and as intangible ways of making a man suffer as has a woman. How do you stand with Rayner?"

"Precisely where I stood five years ago. He is the most determined enemy I have in the service, and will down me if he can; but I have learned a good deal in my time. There is a grim sort of comfort now in knowing that while he would gladly trip me I can make him miserable by being too strong for him."

"You still hold the same theory as to his evidence you did at the time of the court? of course I have heard what you said to and of him."

"I have never changed in that respect."

"But supposing that—mind you, *I* believe he was utterly mistaken in what he thought he heard and saw,—supposing that all that was testified to by him actually occurred, have you any theory that would point out the real criminal?"

"Only one. If that money was ever handed me that day at Battle Butte, only one man could have made away with it; and it is useless to charge it to him."

"You mean Rayner?"

"I *have* to mean Rayner."

"But you claim it never reached you?"

"Certainly."

"Yet every other package—memoranda and all—was handed you?"

"Not only that, but Captain Hull handed me the money-packet with the others,—took them all from his saddle-bags just before the charge. The packet was sealed when he gave it to me, and when I broke the seal it was stuffed with worthless blanks."

"And you have never suspected a soldier,—a single messenger or servant?"

"Not one. Whom could I?"

"Hayne, had you any knowledge of this man Clancy before?"

"Clancy! The drunken fellow we pulled out of the fire?"

"The same."

"No; never to my knowledge saw or heard of him, except when he appeared as witness at the court."

"Yet he was with the —th Cavalry at that very fight at Battle Butte. He was a sergeant then, though not in Hull's troop."

"Does he say he knew me? or does he talk of that affair?" asked the lieutenant, with sudden interest.

"Not that. He cannot be said to say anything; but he was wonderfully affected over your rescuing him,—strangely so, one of the nurses persists in telling me, though the steward and Mrs. Clancy declare it was just drink and excitement. Still, I have drawn from him that he knew you well by sight during that campaign; but he says he was not by when Hull was killed."

"Does he act as though he knew anything that could throw any light on the matter?"

"I cannot say. His wife declares he has been queer all winter,—hard drinking,—and of course that is possible."

"Sam told me there was a soldier here two nights ago who wanted to talk with me, but the man was drunk, and he would not let him in or tell me. He thought he wanted to borrow money."

"I declare, I believe it was Clancy!" said the doctor. "If he wants to see you and talk, let him. There's no telling but what even a drink-racked brain may bring the matter to light."

And long that night Mr. Hayne sat there thinking, partly of what the doctor had said, but more of what had occurred during the late afternoon. Midnight was called by the sentries. He went to his door and looked out on the broad, bleak prairie, the moonlight glinting on the tin roofing of the patch of buildings over at the station far across the dreary level and glistening on the patches of snow that here and there streaked the surface. It was all so cold and calm and still. His blood was hot and fevered. Something invited him into the peace and purity of the night. He threw on his overcoat and furs, and strolled up to the gateway, past the silent and deserted store, whose lighted bar and billiard-room was generally the last thing to close along Prairie Avenue. There was not a glimmer of light about the quarters of the trader or the surgeon's beyond. One or two faint gleams stole through the blinds at the big hospital, and told of the night-watch by some fevered bedside. He passed on around the fence and took a path that led to the target-ranges north of the post and back of officers' row, thinking deeply all the while; and finally, re-entering the garrison by the west gate, he came down along the hard gravelled walk that passed in circular sweeps the offices and the big house of the colonel commanding and then bore straight away in front of the entire line. All was darkness and quiet. He passed in succession the houses of the field-officers of the cavalry, looked longingly at the darkened front of Major Waldron's cottage, where he had lived so sweet an hour before the setting of the last sun, then went on again and paused surprised in front of Captain Rayner's. A bright light was still burning in the front room on the second floor. Was she, too, awake and thinking of that interview? He looked wistfully at the lace curtains that shrouded the interior, and then the clank of a cavalry sabre sounded in his ears, and a tall officer came springily across the road.

"Who the devil's that?" was the blunt military greeting.

"Mr. Hayne," was the quiet reply.

"What? Mr. Hayne? Oh! Beg your pardon, man,—couldn't imagine who it was mooning around out here after midnight."

"I don't wonder," answered Hayne. "I am rather given to late hours, and after reading a long time I often take a stroll before turning in."

"Ah, yes: I see. Well, won't you drop in and chat awhile? I'm officer of the day, and have to owl to-night."

"Thanks, no, not this time; I must go to bed. Good-night, Mr. Blake."

"Good-night to you, Mr. Hayne," said Blake, then stood gazing perplexedly after him. "Now, my fine fellow," was his dissatisfied query, "what on earth do you mean by prowling around Rayner's at this hour of the night?"

XI.

It was very generally known throughout Fort Warrener by ten o'clock on the following morning that Mr. Hayne had returned to duty and was one of the first officers to appear at the *matinée*. Once more the colonel had risen from his chair, taken him by the hand, and welcomed him. This time he expressed the hope that nothing would now occur to prevent their seeing him daily.

"Won't you come in to the club-room?" asked Captain Gregg, afterwards. "We will be pleased to have you."

"Excuse me, captain, I shall be engaged all morning," answered Mr. Hayne, and walked on down the row. Nearly all the officers were strolling away in groups of three or four. Hayne walked past them all with quick, soldierly step and almost aggressive manner, and was soon far ahead, all by himself. Finding it an unprofitable subject, there had been little talk between the two regiments as to what Mr. Hayne's status should be on his reappearance. Everybody heard that he had somewhat rudely spurned the advances of Ross and his companions. Indeed, Ross had told the story with strong coloring to more than half the denizens of officers' row. Evidently he desired no further friendship or intercourse with his brother blue-straps; and only a few of the cavalry officers found his society attractive. He played delightfully; he was well read; but in general talk he was not entertaining. "Altogether too sepulchral,—or at least funereal," explained the cavalry. "He never laughs, and rarely smiles, and he's as glum as a Quaker meeting," was another complaint. So a social success was hardly to be predicted for Mr. Hayne.

While he could not be invited where just a few infantry people were the other guests, from a big general gathering or party he, of course, could not be omitted; but there he would have his cavalry and medical friends to talk to, and then there was Major Waldron. It was a grievous pity that there should be such an element of embarrassment, but it couldn't be helped. As the regimental adjutant had said, Hayne himself was the main obstacle to his restoration to regimental friendship. No man who piques himself on the belief that he is about to do

a virtuous and praiseworthy act will be apt to persevere when the object of his benevolence treats him with cold contempt. If Mr. Hayne saw fit to repudiate the civilities a few officers essayed to extend to him, no others would subject themselves to similar rebuffs; and if he could stand the *status quo*, why, the regiment could; and that, said the Riflers, was the end of the matter.

But it was not the end, by a good deal. Some few of the ladies of the infantry, actuated by Mrs. Rayner's vehement exposition of the case, had aligned themselves on her side as against the post commander, and by their general conduct sought to convey to the colonel and to the ladies who were present at the first dinner given Mr. Hayne thorough disapproval of their course. This put the cavalry people on their mettle and led to a division in the garrison; and as Major Waldron was, in Mrs. Rayner's eyes, equally culpable with the colonel, it so resulted that two or three infantry households, together with some unmarried subalterns, were arrayed socially against their own battalion commander as well as against the grand panjandrum at post head-quarters. If it had not been for the determined attitude of Mr. Hayne himself, the garrison might speedily have been resolved into two parties,—Hayne and anti-Hayne sympathizers; but the whole bearing of that young man was fiercely repellent of sympathy: he would have none of it. "Hayne's position," said Major Waldron, "is practically this: he holds that no man who has borne himself as he has during these five years—denied himself everything that he might make up every cent that was lost, though he was in no wise responsible for the loss—could by any possibility have been guilty of the charges on which he was tried. From this he will not abate one jot or tittle; and he refuses now to restore to his friendship the men who repudiated him in his years of trouble, except on their profession of faith in his entire innocence." Now, this was something the cavalry could not do without some impeachment of the evidence which was heaped up against the poor fellow at the time of the trial; and it was something the infantry would not do, because thereby they would virtually pronounce one at least of their own officers to have repeatedly and persistently given false testimony. In the case of Waldron and the cavalry, however, it was possible for Hayne to return their calls of courtesy, because they, having never "sent him to Coventry," received him precisely as they would receive any other officer. With the Riflers it was different: having once "cut" him as though by unanimous accord, and having taught the young officers joining year after year to regard him as a criminal, *they* could be restored to Mr. Hayne's friendship, as has been said before, only "on confession of error." Buxton and two or three of his stamp called or left their cards on Mr. Hayne because their colonel had so done; but precisely as the ceremony was performed, just so was it returned. Buxton was red with wrath over what he termed Hayne's conceited and supercilious manner when returning his call: "I called upon him like a gentleman, by thunder, just to let him understand I wanted to help him out of the mire, and told him if there was anything I could do for him that a gentleman *could* do, not to hesitate about letting me know; and when he came to my house to-day,

damned if he didn't patronize *me!*—talked to me about the Plevna siege, and wanted to discuss Gourko and the Balkans or some other fool thing: what in thunder have I to do with campaigns in Turkey?—and I thought he meant those nigger soldiers the British have in India,—Goorkhas, I know now,—and I *did* tell him it was an awful blunder, that only a Russian would make, to take those Sepoy fellows and put 'em into a winter campaign. Of course I hadn't been booking up the subject, and he had, and sprung it on me; and then, by gad, as he was going, he said he had books and maps he would lend me, and if there was anything he could do for me that a gentleman *could* do, not to hesitate about asking. Damn his impudence!"

Poor Buxton! One of his idiosyncrasies was to talk wisely to the juniors on the subject of European campaigns and to criticise the moves of generals whose very names and centuries were entangling snares. His own subalterns were, unfortunately for him, at the house when Hayne called, and when he, as was his wont, began to expound on current military topics. "A little learning," even, he had not, and the dangerous thing that that would have been was supplanted by something quite as bad, if not worse. He was trapped and thrown by the quiet-mannered infantry subaltern, and it was all Messrs. Freeman and Royce could do to restrain their impulse to rush after Hayne and embrace him. Buxton was cordially detested by his "subs," and well knew they would tell the story of his defeat, so he made a virtue of necessity and came out with his own version. Theirs was far more ludierous, and, while it made Mr. Hayne famous, he gained another enemy. The —th could not fail to notice how soon after that all social recognition ceased between their bulky captain and the pale, slender subaltern; and Mrs. Buxton and Mrs. Rayner became suddenly infatuated with each other, while their lords were seldom seen except together.

All this time, however, Miss Travers was making friends throughout the garrison. No one ever presumed to discuss the Hayne affair in her presence, because of her relationship to the Rayners; and yet Mrs. Waldron had told several people how delightfully she and Mr. Hayne had spent an afternoon together. Did not Mrs. Rayner declare that Mrs. Waldron was a woman who told everything she knew, or words to that effect? It is safe to say that the garrison was greatly interested in the story. How strange it was that he should have had a *tête-à-tête* with the sister of his bitterest foe! *When* did they meet? Had they met since? Would they meet again? All these were questions eagerly discussed, yet never asked of the parties themselves, Mr. Hayne's reputation for snubbing people standing him in excellent stead, and Miss Travers's quiet dignity and reserve of manner being too much for those who would have given a good deal to gain her confidence. But there was Mrs. Rayner. She, at least, with all her high and mighty ways, was no unapproachable creature when it came to finding out what she thought of other people's conduct. So half a dozen, at least, had more or less confidentially asked if she knew of Mr. Hayne and Miss Travers's meeting. Indeed she did! and she had given Nellie her opinion of her conduct very decidedly. It was Captain Rayner him-

self who interposed, she said, and forbade her upbraiding Nellie any further. Nellie being either in an adjoining room or up in her own on several occasions when these queries were propounded to her sister, it goes without saying that that estimable woman, after the manner of her sex, had elevated her voice in responding, so that there was no possibility of the wicked girl's failing to get the full benefit of the scourging she deserved. Rayner had, indeed, positively forbidden her further rebuking Nellie; but the man does not live who can prevent one woman's punishing another so long as she can get within earshot, and Miss Travers was paying dearly for her independence.

It cannot be estimated just how great a disappointment her visit to the frontier was proving to that young lady, simply because she kept her own counsel. There were women in the garrison who longed to take her to their hearts and homes, she was so fresh and pure and sweet and winning, they said; but how could they, when her sister would recognize them only by the coldest possible nod? Nellie was not happy, that was certain, though she made no complaint, and though the young officers who were daily her devotees declared she was bright and attractive as she could be. There were still frequent dances and parties in the garrison, but March was nearly spent, and the weather had been so vile and blustering that they could not move beyond the limits of the post. April might bring a change for the better in the weather, but Miss Travers wondered how it could better her position.

It is hard for a woman of spirit to be materially dependent on any one, and Miss Travers was virtually dependent on her brother-in-law. The little share of her father's hard savings was spent on her education. Once free from school, she was bound to another apprenticeship, and sister Kate, though indulgent, fond, and proud, lost no opportunity of telling her how much she owed to Captain Rayner. It got to be a fearful weight before the first summer was well over. It was the main secret of her acceptance of Mr. Van Antwerp. And now, until she would consent to name the day that should bind her for life to him, she had no home but such as Kate Rayner could offer her; and Kate was bitterly offended at her. There was just one chance to end it now and forever, and to relieve her sister and the captain of the burden of her support. *Could* she make up her mind to do it? And Mr. Van Antwerp offered the opportunity.

So far from breaking with her, as she half expected,—so far from being even angry and reproachful on receiving the letter she had written telling him all about her meetings with Mr. Hayne,—he had written again and again, reproaching himself for his doubts and fears, begging her forgiveness for having written and telegraphed to Kate, humbling himself before her in the most abject way, and imploring her to reconsider her determination and to let him write to Captain and Mrs. Rayner to return to their Eastern home at once, that the marriage might take place forthwith and he could bear her away to Europe in May. Letter after letter came, eager, imploring, full of tenderest love and devotion, full of the saddest apprehension, never reproaching, never doubting, never commanding or restraining. The man had found the way to touch a woman of her generous nature: he had left all to her;

he was at her mercy; and she knew well that he loved her fervently and that to lose her would wellnigh break his heart. Could she say the word and be free? Surely, as this man's wife there would be no serfdom; and, yet, could she wed a man for whom she felt no spark of love?

They went down to the creek one fine morning early in April. There had been a sudden thaw of the snows up the gorges of the Rockies, and the stream had overleaped its banks, spread over the lowlands, and flooded some broad depressions in the prairie. Then, capricious as a woman's moods, the wind whistled around from the north one night and bound the lakelets in a band of ice. The skating was gorgeous, and all the pretty ankles on the post were rejoicing in the opportunity before the setting of another sun. Coming homeward at luncheon-time, Mrs. Rayner, Mrs. Buxton, Miss Travers, and one or two others, escorted by a squad of bachelors, strolled somewhat slowly along Prairie Avenue towards the gate. It so happened that the married ladies were foremost in the little party, when who should meet them but Mr. Hayne, coming from the east gate! Mrs. Rayner and Mrs. Buxton, though passing him almost elbow to elbow, looked straight ahead or otherwise avoided his eye. He raised his forage-cap in general acknowledgment of the presence of ladies with the officers, but glanced coldly from one to the other until his blue eyes lighted on Miss Travers. No woman in that group could fail to note the leap of sunshine and gladness to his face, the instant flush that rose to his cheek. Miss Travers, herself, saw it quickly, as did the maiden walking just behind her, and her heart bounded at the sight. She bowed as their eyes met, spoke his name in low tone, and strove to hide her face from Mr. Blake, who turned completely around and stole a sudden glance at her. She could no more account for than she could control it, but her face was burning. Mrs. Rayner, too, looked around and stared at her, but this she met firmly, her dark eyes never quailing before the angry glare in her sister's. Blake was beginning to like Hayne and to dislike Mrs. Rayner, and he always *did* like mischief.

"You owe me a grudge, Miss Travers, if you did but know it," he said, so that all could hear.

"You, Mr. Blake! How can that be possible?"

"I spoiled a serenade for you a few nights ago. I was officer of the day, and caught sight of a man gazing up at your window after midnight. I felt sure he was going to sing: so, like a good fellow, I ran over to play an accompaniment, and then—would you believe it? —he wouldn't sing, after all."

She was white now. Her eyes were gazing almost imploringly at him. Something warned him to hold his peace, and he broke off short.

"*Who* was it? Oh, *do* tell us, Mr. Blake!" were the exclamations, Mrs. Rayner being most impetuous in her demands. Again Blake caught the appeal in Miss Travers's eyes.

"That's what I want to know," he responded, mendaciously. "When I woke up next morning, the whole thing was a dream, and I couldn't fix the fellow at all."

There was a chorus of disappointment and indignation. The idea of spoiling such a gem of a sensation! But Blake took it all complacently, until he got home. Then it began to worry him.

Was it possible that she knew he was there?

That night there was a disturbance in the garrison. Just after ten o'clock, and while the sentries were calling off the hour, a woman's shrieks and cries were heard over behind the quarters of Company B and close to the cottage occupied by Lieutenant Hayne. The officers of the guard ran to the spot with several men, and found Private Clancy struggling and swearing in the grasp of two or three soldiers, while Mrs. Clancy was imploring them not to let him go, he was wild-like again; it was drink; he had the horrors, and was batin' her while she was tryin' to get him home. And Clancy's appearance bore out her words. He was wild and drunken; but he swore he meant no harm; he struggled hard for freedom; he vowed he only wanted to see the lieutenant at his quarters; and Mr. Hayne, lamp in hand, had come upon the scene, and was striving to quiet the woman, who only screamed and protested the louder. At his quiet order the soldiers released Clancy, and the man stood patient and subordinate.

"Did you want to see me, Clancy?" asked Mr. Hayne.

"Askin' yer pardon, sir, I did," began the man, unsteadily, and evidently struggling with the fumes of the liquor he had been drinking; but before he could speak again, Mrs. Clancy's shrieks rang out on the still air:

"Oh, for the love of God, howld him, some o' ye's! He'll kill him! He's mad, I say! Shure 'tis I that know him best. Oh, blessed Vargin, save us! *Don't* let him loose, Misther Foster!" she screamed to the officer of the guard, who at that moment appeared on the full run.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, breathlessly.

"Clancy seems to have been drinking, and wants to talk with me about something, Mr. Foster," said Hayne, quietly. "He belongs to my company, and I will be responsible that he goes home. It is really Mrs. Clancy that is making all the trouble."

"Oh, for the love of God, hear him, now, whin the man was tearin' the hair o' me this minute! Oh, howld him, men! Shure 'tis Captain Rayner wud niver let him go."

"What's the matter, Mrs. Clancy?" spoke a quick, stern voice, and Rayner, with face white as a sheet, suddenly stood in their midst.

"Oh, God be praised, it's here ye are, captin! Shure it's Clancy, sir, dhrunk, sir, and runnin' round the garrison, and batin' me, sir."

"Take him to the guard-house, Mr. Foster," was the stern, sudden order. "Not a word, Clancy," as the man strove to speak. "Off with him; and if he gives you any trouble, send for me."

And as the poor fellow was led away, silence fell upon the group. Mrs. Clancy began a wail of mingled relief and misery, which the captain ordered her to cease and go home. More men came hurrying to the spot, and presently the officer of the day. "It is all right now," said Rayner to the latter. "One of my men—Clancy—was out here drunk and raising a row. I have sent him to the guard-house. Go

back to your quarters, men. Come, captain, will you walk over home with me?"

"Was Mr. Hayne here when the row occurred?" asked the cavalryman, looking as though he wanted to hear something from the young officer who stood a silent witness.

"I don't know," replied Rayner. "It makes no difference, captain. It is not a case of witnesses. I shan't prefer charges against the man. Come!" And he drew him hastily away.

Hayne stood watching them as they disappeared beyond the glimmer of his lamp. Then a hand was placed on his arm:

"Did you notice Captain Rayner's face,—his lips? He was ashen as death."

"Come in here with me," was the reply; and, turning, Hayne led the post surgeon into the house.

XII.

There was an unusual scene at the *matinée* the following morning. When Captain Ray relieved Captain Gregg as officer of the day, and the two were visiting the guard-house and turning over prisoners, they came upon the last name on the list,—Clancy,—and Gregg turned to his regimental comrade and said,—

"No charges are preferred against Clancy, at least none as yet, Captain Ray; but his company commander requests that he be held here until he can talk over his case with the colonel."

"What's he in for?" demanded Captain Ray.

"Getting drunk and raising a row and beating his wife," answered Gregg; whereat there was a titter among the soldiers.

"I never shtruck a woman in me life, sir," said poor Clancy.

"Silence, Clancy!" ordered the sergeant of the guard.

"No, I'm blessed if I believe that part of it, Clancy, drunk or no drunk," said the new officer of the day.—"Take charge of him for the present, sergeant." And away they went to the office.

Captain Rayner was in conversation with the commanding officer as they entered, and the colonel was saying,—

"It is not the proper way to handle the case, captain. If he has been guilty of drunkenness and disorderly conduct he should be brought to trial at once."

"I admit that, sir; but the case is peculiar. It was Mrs. Clancy that made all the noise. I feel sure that after he is perfectly sober I can give him such a talking-to as will put a stop to this trouble."

"Very well, sir. I am willing to let company commanders experiment at least once or twice on their theories, so you can try the scheme; but we of the —th have had some years of experience with the Clancys, and were not a little amused when they turned up again in our midst as accredited members of your company."

"Then, as I understand you, colonel, Clancy is not to be brought to trial for this affair," suddenly spoke the post surgeon.

Everybody looked up in surprise. "Pills" was the last man, ordinarily, to take a hand in the "shop talk" at the morning meetings.

"No, doctor. His captain thinks it unnecessary to prefer charges."

"So do I, sir; and, as I saw the man both before and after his confinement last night, I do not think it was necessary to confine him."

"The officer of the day says there was great disorder," said the colonel, in surprise.

"Ay, sir, so there was; and the thing reminds me of the stories they used to tell on the New York police. It looked to me as though all the row was raised by Mrs. Clancy, as Captain Rayner says; but the man was arrested. That being the case, I would ask the captain for what specific offence he ordered Clancy to the guard-house."

Rayner again was pale as death. He glared at the doctor in amaze and incredulity, while all the officers noted his agitation and were silent in surprise. It was the colonel that came to the rescue:

"Captain Rayner had abundant reason, doctor. It was after taps, though only just after, and, whether causing the trouble or not, the man is the responsible party, not the woman. The captain was right in causing his arrest."

Rayner looked up gratefully.

"I submit to your decision, sir," said the surgeon, "and I apologize for anything I may have asked that was beyond my province. Now I wish to ask a question for my own guidance."

"Go on, doctor."

"In case an enlisted man of this command desire to see an officer of his company,—or any other officer, for that matter,—is it a violation of any military regulation for him to go to his quarters for that purpose?"

Again was Rayner fearfully white and aged-looking. His lips moved as though he would interrupt; but discipline prevailed.

"No, doctor; and yet we have certain customs of service to prevent the men going at all manner of hours and on frivolous errands: a soldier asks his first sergeant's permission first, and if denied by him, and he have what he considers good reason, he can report the whole case."

"But suppose a man is not on company duty: must he hunt up his first sergeant and ask permission to go and see some officer with whom he has business?"

"Well, hardly, in that case."

"That's all, sir." And the doctor subsided.

Among all the officers, as the meeting adjourned, the question was, "What do you suppose 'Pills' was driving at?"

There were two or three who knew. Captain Rayner went first to his quarters, where he had a few moments' hurried consultation with his wife; then they left the house together,—he to have a low-toned and very stern talk to rather than with the abashed Clancy, who listened cap in hand and with hanging head; she to visit the sick child of Mrs. Flanigan, of Company K, whose quarters adjoined those to which the Clancys had recently been assigned. When that Hibernian culprit returned to his roof-tree, released from durance vile, he was surprised to receive a kindly and sympathetic welcome from his captain's wife, who with her own hand had mixed him some comforting drink and was planning with Mrs. Clancy for their greater comfort. "If Clancy

will only promise to quit entirely!" interjected the partner of his joys and sorrows.

Later that day, when the doctor had a little talk with Clancy, the ex-dragoon declared he was going to reform for all he was worth. He was only a distress to everybody when he drank.

"All right, Clancy. And when you are perfectly yourself you can come and see Lieutenant Hayne as soon as you like."

"Loot'nant Hayne is it, sir? Shure I'd be beggin' his pardon for the vexation I gave him last night."

"But you have something you wanted to speak with him about. You said so last night, Clancy," said the doctor, looking him squarely in the eye.

"Shure I was dhrunk, sir. I didn't mane it," he answered; but he shrank and cowered,

The doctor turned and left him.

"If it's only when he's drunk that conscience pricks him and the truth will out, then we must have him drunk again," quoth this unprincipled practitioner.

That same afternoon Miss Travers found that a headache was the result of confinement to an atmosphere somewhat heavily charged with electricity. Mrs. Rayner seemed to bristle every time she approached her sister. Possibly it was the heart, more than the head, that ached, but in either case she needed relief from the exposed position she had occupied ever since Kate's return from the Clancys' in the morning. She had been too long under fire, and was wearied. Even the cheery visits of the garrison gallants had proved of little avail, for Mrs. Rayner was in very ill temper, and made snappish remarks to them which two of them resented and speedily took themselves off. Later Miss Travers went to her room and wrote a letter, and then the sunset gun shook the window, and twilight settled down upon the still frozen earth. She bathed her heated forehead and flushed cheeks, threw a warm cloak over her shoulders, and came slowly down the stairs. Mrs. Rayner met her at the parlor door.

"Kate, I am going for a walk, and shall stop and see Mrs. Waldron."

"Quite an unnecessary piece of information. I saw him as well as you. He has just gone there."

Miss Travers flushed hot with indignation:

"I have seen no one; and if you mean that Mr. Hayne has gone to Major Waldron's, I shall not."

"No: I'd meet him on the walk: it would only be a trifle more public."

"You have no right to accuse me of the faintest expectation of meeting him anywhere. I repeat, I had not thought of such a thing."

"You might just as well do it. You cannot make your antagonism to my husband much more pointed than you have already. And as for meeting Mr. Hayne, the only advice I presume to give now is that for your own sake you keep your blushes under better control than you did the last time you met—that I know of." And, with this triumphant insult as a parting shot, Mrs. Rayner wheeled and marched off through the parlor.

What was a girl to do? Nellie Travers was not of the crying kind, and was denied a vast amount of comfort in consequence. She stood a few moments quivering under the lash of injustice and insult to which she had been subjected. She longed for a breath of pure, fresh air; but there would be no enjoyment even in that now. She needed sympathy and help, if ever girl did, but where was she to find it? The women who most attracted her and who would have warmly welcomed her at any time—the women whom she would eagerly have gone to in her trouble—were practically denied to her. Mrs. Rayner in her quarrel had declared war against the cavalry, and Mrs. Stannard and Mrs. Ray, who had shown a disposition to welcome Nellie warmly, were no longer callers at the house. Mrs. Waldron, who was kind and motherly to the girl and loved to have her with her, was so embarrassed by Mrs. Rayner's determined snubs that she hardly knew how to treat the matter. She would no longer visit Mrs. Rayner informally, as had been her custom, yet she wanted the girl to come to her. If she went, Miss Travers well knew that on her return to the house she would be received by a volley of sarcasms about her preference for the society of people who were the avowed enemies of her benefactors. If she remained in the house, it was to become in person the target for her sister's undeserved sneers and censure. The situation was becoming simply unbearable. Twice she began and twice she tore to fragments the letter for which Mr. Van Antwerp was daily imploring, and this evening she once more turned and slowly sought her room, threw off her wraps, and took up her writing-desk. It was not yet dark. There was still light enough for her purpose, if she went close to the window. Every nerve was tingling with the sense of wrong and ignominy; every throb of her heart but intensified the longing for relief from the thraldom of her position. She saw only one path to lead her from such crushing dependence. There was his last letter, received only that day, urging, imploring her to leave Warrener forthwith. Mrs. Rayner had declared to him her readiness to bring her East provided she would fix an early date for the wedding. Was it not a future many a girl might envy? Was he not tender, faithful, patient, devoted as man could be? Had he not social position and competence? Was he not high-bred, courteous, refined,—a gentleman in all his acts and words? Why could she not love him, and be content? There on the desk lay a little scrap of note-paper; there lay her pen; a dozen words only were necessary. One moment she gazed longingly, wistfully, at the far-away, darkening heights of the Rockies, watching the last rose-tinted gleams on the snowy peaks; then with sudden impulse she seized her pen and drew the portfolio to the window-seat. As she did so, a soldierly figure came briskly down the walk; a pale, clear-cut face glanced up at her casement; a quick light of recognition and pleasure flashed in his eyes; the little forage-cap was raised with courteous grace, though the step never slackened, and Miss Travers felt that her cheek, too, was flushing again, as Mr. Hayne strode rapidly by. She stood there another moment, and then——it had grown too dark to write.

When Mrs. Rayner, after calling twice from the bottom of the

stairs, finally went up into her room and impatiently pushed open the door, all was darkness except the glimmer from the hearth:

"Nellie, where are you?"

"Here," answered Miss Travers, starting up from the sofa. "I think I must have been asleep."

"Your head is hot as fire," said her sister, laying her firm white hand upon the burning forehead. "I suppose you are going to be downright ill, by way of diversion. Just understand one thing, Nellie: that doctor does not come into my house."

"What doctor?—not that I want one," asked Miss Travers, wearily.

"Dr. Pease, the post surgeon, I mean. Of course you have heard how he is mixing himself in my husband's affairs and making trouble with various people."

"I have heard nothing, Kate."

"I don't wonder your friends are ashamed to tell you. Things have come to a pretty pass, when officers are going around holding private meetings with enlisted men!"

"I hardly know the doctor at all, Kate, and cannot imagine what affairs of your husband's he can interfere with."

"It was he that put up Clancy to making the disturbance at Mr. Hayne's last night and getting into the guard-house, and tried to prove that he had a right to go there and that the captain had no right to arrest him."

"Was Clancy trying to see Mr. Hayne?" asked Miss Travers, quickly.

"How should I know?" said her sister, pettishly. "He was drunk, and probably didn't know what he was doing."

"And Captain Rayner arrested him for—for trying to see Mr. Hayne?"

"Captain Rayner arrested him for being drunk and creating a disturbance, as it was his duty to arrest any soldier under such circumstances," replied her sister, with majestic wrath, "and I will not tolerate it that you should criticise his conduct."

"I have made no criticism, Kate. I have simply made inquiry; but I have learned what no one else could have made me believe."

"Nellie Travers, be careful what you say, or what you insinuate. What do you mean?"

"I mean, Kate, that it is my belief that there is something at the bottom of those stories of Clancy's strange talk when in the hospital. I believe he thinks he knows something which would turn all suspicion from Mr. Hayne to a totally different man. I believe that, for reasons which I cannot fathom, you are determined Mr. Hayne shall not see him or hear of it. It was you that sent Captain Rayner over there last night. Mrs. Clancy came here at tattoo, and, from the time she left, you were at the front door or window. You were the first to hear her cries, and came running in to tell the captain to go at once. Kate, *why* did you stand there listening from the time she left the kitchen, unless you expected to hear just what happened over there behind the company barracks?"

Mrs. Rayner would give no answer. Anger, rage, retaliation, all in turn were pictured on her furious face, but died away before the calm and unconquerable gaze in her sister's eyes. For the first time in her life Kate Rayner realized that her "baby Nell" had the stronger will of the two. For one instant she contemplated vengeance. A torrent of invective leaped readily to her lips. "Outrage," "ingrate," "insult," were the first three distinguishable epithets applied to her sister or her sister's words; then, "See if Mr. Van Antwerp will tolerate such conduct. I'll write this very day," was the impotent threat that followed; and finally, utterly defeated, thoroughly convinced that she was powerless against her sister's reckless love of "fair play at any price," she felt that her wrath was giving way to dismay, and turned and fled, lest Nellie should see the flag of surrender on her paling cheeks.

XIII.

Two nights after this, as Captain Buxton was sulkily going the rounds of the sentries he made a discovery which greatly enlivened an otherwise uneventful tour as officer of the day. It had been his general custom on such occasions to take the shortest way across the parade to the guard-house, make brief and perfunctory inspection there, then go on down the hill to the creek valley and successively visit the sentries around the stables. If the night were wet or cold, he went back the same way, ignoring the sentries at the coal- and store-sheds along Prairie Avenue. This was a sharply cold night, and very dark, but equally still. It was between twelve and one o'clock—nearer one than twelve—as he climbed the hill on his homeward way, and, instead of taking the short cut, turned northward and struck for the gloomy mass of sheds dimly discernible some forty yards from the crest. He had heard other officers speak of the fact that Mr. Hayne's lights were burning until long after midnight, and that, dropping in there, they had found him seated at his desk with a green shade over his eyes, studying by the aid of two student-lamps; "boning to be a general, probably," was the comment of captains of Buxton's calibre, who, having grown old in the service and in their own ignorance, were fiercely intolerant of lieutenants who strove to improve in professional reading instead of spending their time making out the company muster-rolls and clothing-accounts, as they should do. Buxton wanted to see for himself what the night-lights meant, and was plunging heavily ahead through the darkness, when suddenly brought to a stand by the sharp challenge of the sentry at the coal-shed. He whispered the mystic countersign over the levelled bayonet of the infantryman, swearing to himself at the regulation which puts an officer in such a "stand-and-deliver" attitude for the time being, and then, by way of getting square with the soldier for the sharply military way in which his duty as sentry had been performed, the captain proceeded to catechise him as to his orders. The soldier had been well taught, and knew all his "responses" by rote,—far better than Buxton, for that matter, as the latter was anything but an exemplar of perfection in tactics or sentry duty; but this did not prevent Buxton's snappishly telling him he was wrong in several points

and contemptuously inquiring where he had learned such trash. The soldier promptly but respectfully responded that those were the exact instructions he had received at the adjutant's school, and Buxton knew from experience that he was getting on dangerous ground. He would have stuck to his point, however, in default of something else to find fault with, but that the crack of a whip, the crunching of hoofs, and a rattle of wheels out in the darkness quickly diverted his attention.

"What's that, sentry?" he sharply inquired.

"A carriage, sir. Leastwise, I think it must be."

"Why don't you know, sir? It must have been on your post."

"No, sir; it was 'way off my post. It drove up to Lieutenant Hayne's about half an hour ago."

"Where'd it come from?" asked the captain, eagerly.

"From town, sir, I suppose." And, leaving the sentry to his own reflections, which, on the whole, were not complimentary to his superior officer, Captain Buxton strode rapidly through the darkness to Lieutenant Hayne's quarters. Bright lights were still burning within, both on the ground-floor and in a room above. The sentries were just beginning the call of one o'clock when he reached the gate and halted, gazing inquisitively at the house front. Then he turned and listened to the rattle of wheels growing faint in the distance as the team drove away towards the prairie town. If Hayne had gone to town at that hour of the night it was a most unusual proceeding, and he had not the colonel's permission to absent himself from the post: of that the officer of the day was certain. Then, again, he would not have gone and left all his lights burning. No: that vehicle, whatever it was, had brought somebody out to see him,—somebody who proposed to remain several hours; otherwise the carriage would not have driven away. In confirmation of this theory, he heard voices, cheery voices, in laughing talk, and one of them made him prick up his ears. He heard the piano crisply trilling a response to light, skilful fingers. He longed for a peep within, and regretted that he had dropped Mr. Hayne from the list of his acquaintance. He recognized Hayne's shadow, presently, thrown by the lamp upon the curtained window, and wished that his visitor would come similarly into view. He heard the clink of glasses, and saw the shadow raise a wineglass to the lips, and Sam's Mongolian shape flitted across the screen, bearing a tray with similar suggestive objects. What meant this unheard-of conviviality on the part of the ascetic, the hermit, the midnight-oil-burner, the scholarly recluse of the garrison? Buxton stared with all his eyes and listened with all his ears, starting guiltily when he heard a martial footstep coming quickly up the path, and faced the intruder rather unsteadily. It was only the corporal of the guard, and he glanced at his superior, brought his fur-gauntleted hand in salute to the rifle on his shoulder, and passed on. The next moment Buxton fairly gasped with amaze: he stared an instant at the window as though transfixed, then ran after the corporal, called to him in low, stealthy tone to come back noiselessly, drew him by the sleeve to the front of Hayne's quarters, and pointed to the parlor window. Two shadows were there now,—one

easily recognizable as that of the young officer in his snugly-fitting undress uniform, the other slender, graceful, feminine.

"What do you make that other shadow to be, corporal?" he whispered, hoarsely and hurriedly. "*Look!*" And with that exclamation a shadowed arm seemed to encircle the slender form, the moustached image to bend low and mingle with the outlined luxuriance of tress that decked the other's head, and then, together, with clasping arms, the shadows moved from view.

"What was the other, corporal?" he repeated.

"Well, sir, I should say it was a young woman."

Buxton could hardly wait until morning to see Rayner. When he passed the latter's quarters half an hour later, all was darkness; though, had he but known it, Rayner was not asleep. He was at the house before guard-mounting, and had a confidential and evidently exciting talk with the captain; and when he went, just as the trumpets were sounding, these words were heard at the front door:

"She never left until after daylight, when the same rig drove her back to town. There was a stranger with her then."

That morning both Rayner and Buxton looked hard at Mr. Hayne when he came in to the *matinée;* but he was just as calm and quiet as ever, and, having saluted the commanding officer, took a seat by Captain Gregg and was soon occupied in conversation with him. Not a word was said by the officer of the day about the mysterious visitor to the garrison the previous night. With Captain Rayner, however, he was again in conversation much of the day, and to him, not to his successor as officer of the day, did he communicate all the details of the previous night's adventure and his theories thereanent.

Late that night, having occasion to step to his front door, convinced that he heard stealthy footsteps on his piazza, Mr. Hayne could see nobody in the darkness, but found his front gate open. He walked around his little house; but not a man was visible. His heart was full of a new and strange excitement that night, and, as before, he threw on his overcoat and furs and took a rapid walk around the garrison, gazing up into the starry heavens and drinking in great draughts of the pure, bracing air. Returning, he came down along the front of officers' row, and as he approached Rayner's quarters his eyes rested longingly upon the window he knew to be hers now; but all was darkness. As he rapidly neared the house, however, he became aware of two bulky figures at the gate, and, as he walked briskly past, recognized the overcoats as those of officers. One man was doubtless Rayner, the other he could not tell; for both, the instant they recognized his step, seemed to avert their heads. Once home again, he soon sought his room and pillow; but, long before he could sleep, again and again a sweet vision seemed to come to him: he *could not* shut out the thought of Nellie Travers,—of how she looked and what she said that very afternoon.

He had gone to call at Mrs. Waldron's soon after dark. He was at the piano, playing for her, when he became conscious that another lady had entered the room, and, turning, saw Nellie Travers. He rose and bowed to her, extending his hand as he did so, and knowing that his heart was thumping and his color rising as he felt the soft, warm

touch of her slender fingers in his grasp. She, too, had flushed,—any one could see it, though the lamps were not turned high, nor was the firelight strong.

"Miss Travers has come to take tea very quietly with me, Mr. Hayne,—she is so soon to return to the East,—and now I want you to stay and join us. No one will be here but the major; and we will have a lovely time with our music. You will, won't you?"

"So soon to return to the East!" How harsh, how strange and unwelcome, the words sounded! How they seemed to oppress him and prevent his reply! He stood a moment dazed and vaguely worried: he could not explain it. He looked from Mrs. Waldron's kind face to the sweet, flushed, lovely features there so near him, and something told him that he could never let them go and find even hope or content in life again. How, why had she so strangely come into his lonely life, radiant, beautiful, bewildering as some suddenly blazing star in the darkest corner of the heavens? Whence had come this strange power that enthralled him? He gazed into her sweet face, with its downcast, troubled eyes, and then, in bewilderment, turned to Mrs. Waldron:

"I—I had no idea Miss Travers was going East again just now. It seems only a few days since she came."

"It is over a month; but all the same this is a sudden decision. I knew nothing of it until yesterday.—You said Mrs. Rayner was better to-day, Nellie?"

"Yes, a little; but she is far from well. I think the captain will go, too, just as soon as he can arrange for leave of absence," was the low-toned answer. He had released, or rather she had withdrawn, her hand, and he still stood there, fascinated. His eyes could not quit their gaze. She going away?—She? Oh, it *could* not be! What—what would life become without the sight of that radiant face, that slender, graceful, girlish form?

"Is not this very unexpected?" he struggled to say. "I thought—I heard you were to spend several months here."

"It *was* so intended, Mr. Hayne; but my sister's health requires speedy change. She has been growing worse ever since we came, and she will not get well here."

"And when do you go?" he asked, blankly.

"Just as soon as we can pack; though we may wait two or three days for a—for a telegram."

There was a complete break in the conversation for a full quarter of a minute,—not such a long time in itself, but unconventionally long under such circumstances. Then Mrs. Waldron suddenly and remarkably arose:

"I'll leave you to entertain Mr. Hayne a few moments, Nellie. I am the slave of my cook, and she knows nothing of Mr. Hayne's being here to tea with us: so I must tell her and avert disaster." And with this barefaced—statement on her lips and conscience, where it rested with equal lightness, that exemplary lady quitted the room. In the sanctity of the connubial chamber that evening, some hours later, she thus explained her action to her silent spouse:

"Right or wrong, I meant that those two young people should have

a chance to know each other. I have been convinced for three weeks that she is being forced into this New York match, and for the last week that she is wretchedly unhappy. You say you believe him a wronged and injured man, only you can't prove it, and you have said that nothing could be too good for him in this life as a reward for all his bravery and fortitude under fearful trials. Then Nellie Travers isn't too good for him, sweet as she is, and I don't care who calls me a match-maker."

But with Mrs. Waldron away the two appeared to have made but halting progress towards friendship. With all her outspoken pluck at school and at home, Miss Travers was strangely ill at ease and embarrassed now. Mr. Hayne was the first to gain self-control and to endeavor to bring the conversation back to a natural channel. It was a struggle; but he had grown accustomed to struggles. He could not imagine that a girl whom he had met only once or twice should have for him anything more than the vaguest and most casual interest. He well knew by this time how deep and vehement was the interest she had aroused in his heart; but it would never do to betray himself so soon. He strove to interest her in reference to the music she would hear, and to learn from her where they were going. This she answered. They would go no farther East than St. Louis or Chicago. They might go South as far as Nashville until mid-May. As for the summer, it would depend on the captain and his leave of absence. It was all vague and unsettled. Mrs. Rayner was so wretched that her husband was convinced that she ought to leave for the States as soon as possible, and of course "she" must go with her. All the gladness, brightness, vivacity he had seen and heard of as her marked characteristics seemed gone; and, yet, she wanted to speak with him,—wanted to be with him. What could be wrong? he asked himself. It was not until Mrs. Waldron's step was heard returning that she nerved herself to sudden, almost desperate, effort. She startled him with her vehemence:

"Mr. Hayne, there *is* something I must tell you before I go. If no opportunity occur, I'll write it."

And those were the words that had been haunting him all the evening, for they were not again alone, and he had no chance to ask a question. What *could* she mean? For years he had been living a life of stern self-denial; but long before his promotion the last penny of the obligation that, justly or otherwise, had been laid upon his shoulders was paid with interest. He was a man free and self-respecting, strong, resolute, and possessed of an independence that never would have been his had his life run on in the same easy, trusting, happy-go-lucky style in which he had spent the first two years of his army career. But in his isolation he had allowed himself no thought of anything that could for a moment distract him from the stern purpose to which he had devoted every energy. He would win back, command, *compel*, the respect of his comrades,—would bring to confusion those who had sought to pull him down; and until that stood accomplished he would know no other claim. In the exile of the mountain-station he saw no women but the wives of his senior officers; and they merely bowed when they happened to meet him: some did not even do that. Now at last he

had met and yielded to the first of two conquerors before whom even the bravest and the strongest go down infallibly,—Love and Death. Suddenly, but irresistibly, the sweet face and thrilling tones of that young girl had seized and filled his heart, to the utter exclusion of every other passion; and just in proportion to the emptiness and yearning of his life before their meeting was the intensity of the love and longing that possessed him now. It was useless to try and analyze the suddenness and subtilty of its approach: the power of love had overmastered him. He could only realize that it was here and he must obey. Late into the morning hours he lay there, his brain whirling with its varied and bewildering emotions. Win her he must, or the blackness and desolation of the past five years would be as nothing compared with the misery of the years to come. Woo her he would, and not without hope, if ever woman's eyes gave proof of sympathy and trust. But now at last he realized that the time had come when for her sake—not for his—he must adopt a new course. Hitherto he had scorned and repelled all overtures that were not prefaced by an expression of belief in his utter innocence in the past. Hitherto he had chosen to live the life of an anchorite, and had abjured the society of women. Hitherto he had refused the half-extended proffers of comrades who had sought to continue the investigation of a chain of circumstances that, complete, might have proved him a wronged and defrauded man. The missing links were not beyond recovery in skilful hands; but in the shock and horror which he felt on realizing that it was not only possible but certain that a jury of his comrade officers could deem him guilty of a low crime, he hid his face and turned from all. *Now* the time had come to reopen the case. He well knew that a revulsion of feeling had set in which nothing but his own stubbornness held in check. He knew that he had friends and sympathizers among officers high in rank. He had only a few days before heard from Major Waldron's lips a strong intimation that it was his duty to "come out of his shell" and reassert himself. "You must remember this, Hayne," said he: "you had been only two years in service when tried by court-martial. You were an utter stranger to every member of that court. There was nothing but the evidence to go upon, and that was all against you. The court was made up of officers from other regiments, and was at least impartial. The evidence was almost all from your own, and was presumably well founded. You would call no witnesses for defence. You made your almost defiant statement; refused counsel; refused advice; and what could the court do but convict and sentence? Had I been a member of the court I would have voted just as was done by the court; and yet I believe you now an utterly innocent man."

So, apparently, did the colonel regard him. So, too, did several of the officers of the cavalry. So, too, would most of the youngsters of his own regiment if he would only give them half a chance. In any event, the score was wiped out now; he could afford to take a wife if a woman learned to love him, and what wealth of tenderness and devotion was he not ready to lavish on one who would! But he would offer no one a tarnished name. First and foremost he must now stand up and fight that calumny,—"come out of his shell," as Waldron had said, and

give people a chance to see what manner of man he was. God helping him, he would, and that without delay.

XIV.

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley." Mrs. Rayner, ill in mind and body, had yielded to her lord's entreaties and determined to start eastward with her sister without delay. Packing was already begun. Miss Travers had promised herself that she would within thirty-six hours put Mr. Hayne in possession of certain facts or theories which in her opinion bore strongly upon the "clearing up" of the case against him; Mr. Hayne had determined that he would see Major Waldron on the coming day and begin active efforts towards the restoration of his social rights; the doctor had about decided on a new project for inducing Clancy to unbosom himself of what he knew; Captain Rayner—tired of the long struggle—was almost ready to welcome anything which should establish his subaltern's innocence, and was on the point of asking for six months' leave just as soon as he had arranged for Clancy's final discharge from service: he had reasons for staying at the post until that Hibernian household was fairly and squarely removed; and Mrs. Clancy's plan was to take Mike to the distant East, "where she had frinds." There were other schemes and projects, no doubt, but these mainly concerned our leading characters, and one and all they were put to the right-about by the events of the following day.

The colonel, with his gruff second in command, Major Stannard, had been under orders for several days to proceed on this particular date to a large town a day's journey eastward by rail. A court-martial composed mainly of field-officers was ordered there to assemble for the trial of an old captain of cavalry whose propensity it was not so much to get drunk as never to get drunk without concomitant publicity and discovery. It was a rare thing for the old war-dog to take so much as a glass of wine; he went for months without it; but the instant he began to drink he was moved to do or say something disreputable, and that was the trouble now. He was an unlucky old trooper, who had risen from the lowest grades, fought with credit, and even, at times, commanded his regiment, during the war; but war records could not save him when he wouldn't save himself, and he had to go. The court was ordered, and the result was a foregone conclusion. The colonel, his adjutant, and Major Stannard were to drive to town during the afternoon and take the east-bound train, leaving Major Waldron in command of the post; but before guard-mounting a telegram was received which was sent from department head-quarters the evening before, announcing that one of the officers detailed for the court was seriously ill, and directing Major Waldron to take his place. So it resulted in the post being left to the command of the senior captain present for duty; and that man was Captain Buxton. He had never had so big a command before in all his life.

Major Waldron of course had to go home and make his preparations. Mr. Hayne, therefore, had brief opportunity to speak with him. It was

seen, however, that they had a short talk together on the major's piazza, and that when they parted the major shook him warmly and cordially by the hand. Rayner, Buxton, Ross, and some juniors happened to be coming down along the walk at the moment, and, seeing them, as though with pointed meaning the major called out, so that all could hear,—

"By the way, Hayne, I wish you would drop in occasionally while I'm gone and take Mrs. Waldron out for a walk or drive: my horses are always at your service. And—a—I'll write to you about that matter the moment I've had a chance to talk with the colonel,—to-morrow, probably." And Hayne touched his cap in parting salute, and went blithely off with brightened eye and rising color.

Buxton glowered after him a moment, and conversation suddenly ceased in their party. Finally he blurted out,—

"Strikes me your major might do a good deal better by himself and his regiment by standing up for its *morale* and discipline than by openly flaunting his favoritism for convicts in our faces. If I were in your regiment I'd cut *him*."

"You wouldn't have to," muttered one of the group to his neighbor: "the cut would have been on the other side long ago." And the speaker was Buxton's own subaltern.

Rayner said nothing. His eyes were troubled and anxious, and he looked after Hayne with an expression far more wearied than vindictive.

"The major is fond of music, captain," said Mr. Ross, with mischievous intent. "He hasn't been to the club since the night you sang 'Eileen Alanna.' That was about the time Hayne's piano came."

"Yes," put in Foster, "Mrs. Waldron says he goes and owls Hayne now night after night just to hear him play."

"It would be well for him, then, if he kept a better guard on Mr. Hayne's *other* visitors," said Buxton, with a black scowl. "I don't know how you gentlemen in the Riflers look upon such matters, but in the —th the man who dared to introduce a woman of the town into his quarters would be kicked out in short order."

"You don't mean to say that anybody accuses Hayne of that, do you?" asked Ross, in amaze.

"I do,—*just* that. Only, I say this to you, it has but just come to light, and only one or two know it. To prove it positively he's got to be allowed more rope; for he got her out of the way last time before we could clinch the matter. If he suspects it is known he won't repeat it; if kept to ourselves he will probably try it again,—and be caught. Now I charge you all to regard this as confidential."

"But, Captain Buxton," said Ross, "this is so serious a matter that I don't like to believe it. Who can prove such a story?"

"Of course not, Mr. Ross. You are quite ready to treat a man as a thief, but can't believe he'll do another thing that is disreputable. That is characteristic of your style of reasoning," said Buxton, with biting sarcasm.

"You can't wither me with contempt, Captain Buxton. I have a right to my opinion, and I have known Mr. Hayne for years, and if I *did* believe him guilty of one crime five years ago I'm not so ready to believe him guilty of another now. This isn't—isn't like Hayne."

"No, of course not, as I said before. Now, will you tell me, Mr. Ross, just why Mr. Hayne chose that ramshackle old shanty out there on the prairie, all by himself, unless it was to be where he could have his chosen companions with him at night and no one be the wiser?"

"I don't pretend to fathom his motives, sir; but I don't believe it was for any such purpose as you seem to think."

"In other words, you think I'm circulating baseless scandal, do you?"

"I have said nothing of the kind; and I protest against your putting words into my mouth I never used."

"You intimated as much, anyhow, and you plainly don't believe it."

"Well, I don't believe—that is, I don't see how it could happen."

"Couldn't the woman drive out from town after dark, send the carriage back, and have it call for her again in the morning?" asked Buxton.

"Possibly. Still, it isn't a proved fact that a woman spent the night at Hayne's, even if a carriage was seen coming out. You've got hold of some Sudsville gossip, probably," replied Ross.

"I have, have I? By God, sir, I'll teach you better manners before we get through with this question. Do you know who saw the carriage, and who saw the woman, both at Hayne's quarters?"

"Certainly I don't! What I don't understand is how you should have been made the recipient of the story."

"Mr. Ross, just govern your tongue, sir, and remember you are speaking to your superior officer, and don't venture to treat my statements with disrespect hereafter. *I saw it myself!*"

"*You!*" gulped Ross, while amaze and incredulity shot across his startled face.

"You!" exclaimed others of the group, in evident astonishment and dismay. Rayner alone looked unchanged. It was no news to him, while to every other man in the party it was a shock. Up to that instant the prevailing belief had been, with Ross, that Buxton had found some garrison gossip and was building an edifice thereon. His positive statement, however, was too much for the most incredulous.

"Now what have you to say?" he asked, in rude triumph.

There was no answer for a moment; then Ross spoke:

"Of course, Captain Buxton, I withdraw any expression of doubt. It never occurred to me that you could have seen it. May I ask when and how?"

"The last time I was officer of the day, sir; and Captain Rayner is my witness as to the time. Others, whom I need not mention, saw it with me. There is no mistake, sir. The woman was there." And Buxton stood enjoying the effect.

Ross looked white and dazed. He turned slowly away, hesitated, looked back, then exclaimed,—

"You are sure it was—it was not some one that had a right to be there?"

"How could it be?" said Buxton, gruffly. "You know he has not an acquaintance in town, or here, who could be with him there at night."

"Does the commanding officer know of it?" asked Mr. Royce, after a moment's silence.

"*I* am the commanding officer, Mr. Royce," said Buxton, with majestic dignity,—"at least I will be after twelve o'clock; and you may depend upon it, gentlemen, this thing will not occur while I am in command without its receiving the exact treatment it deserves. Remember, now, not a word of this to anybody. You are as much interested as I am in bringing to justice a man who will disgrace his uniform and his regiment and insult every lady in the garrison by such an act. This sort of thing of course will run him out of the service for good and all. We simply have to be sure of our ground and make the evidence conclusive. Leave that to me the next time it happens. I repeat, say nothing of this to any one."

But Rayner had already told his wife.

Just as Major Waldron was driving off to the station that bright April afternoon and his carriage was whirling through the east gate, the driver caught sight of Lieutenant Hayne running up Prairie Avenue, waving his hand and shouting to him. He reined in his spirited bays with some difficulty, and Hayne finally caught up with them.

"What is it, Hayne?" asked Waldron, with kindly interest, leaning out of his carriage.

"They will be back to-night, sir. Here is a telegram that has just reached me."

"I can't tell you how sorry I am not to be here to welcome them; but Mrs. Waldron will be delighted, and she will come to call the moment you let her know. Keep them till I get back, if you possibly can."

"Ay, ay, sir. Good-by."

"Good-by, Hayne. God bless you, and—good luck!"

A little later that afternoon Mrs. Rayner had occasion to go into her sister's room. It was almost sunset, and Nellie had been summoned down-stairs to see visitors. Both the ladies were busy with their packing,—Mrs. Rayner, as became an invalid, superintending, and Miss Travers, as became the junior, doing all the work. It was rather trying to pack all the trunks and receive visitors of both sexes at odd hours. Some of her garrison acquaintances would have been glad to come and help, but those whom she would have welcomed were not agreeable to the lady of the house, and those the lady of the house would have chosen were not agreeable to her. The relations between the sisters were somewhat strained and unnatural, and had been growing more and more so for several days past. Mrs. Rayner's desk was already packed away. She wanted to send a note, and bethought her of her sister's portfolio. Opening it, she drew out some paper and envelopes, and with the latter came an envelope sealed and directed. One glance at its superscription sent the blood to her cheek and fire to her eye. Was it possible? Was it credible? Her pet, her baby sister, her pride and delight,—until she found her stronger in will,—her proud-spirited, truthful Nell, was beyond question corresponding with Lieutenant Hayne! Here was a note addressed to him. How many more might not have been exchanged? Ruthlessly now she explored the desk,

searching for something from him, but her scrutiny was vain. Oh, what could she say, what could she do, to convey to her erring sister an adequate sense of the extent of her displeasure? How could she bring her to realize the shame, the guilt, the scandal, of her course? She, Nellie Travers, the betrothed wife of Steven Van Antwerp, corresponding secretly with this—this scoundrel, whose past, crime-laden as it had been, was as nothing compared to the present with its degradation of vice? Ah! she had it! What would ever move her as that could and must?

When the trumpets rang out their sunset call and the boom of the evening gun shook the windows in Fort Warrener and Nellie Travers came running up-stairs again to her room, she started at the sight that met her eyes. There stood Mrs. Rayner, like Juno in wrath inflexible, glaring at her from the commanding height of which she was so proud, and pointing in speechless indignation at the little note that lay upon the open portfolio.

For a moment neither spoke. Then Miss Travers, who had turned very white, but whose blue eyes never flinched and whose lips were set and whose little foot was tapping the carpet ominously, thus began:

"Kate, I do not recognize your right to overhaul my desk or supervise my correspondence."

"Understand this first, Cornelia," said Mrs. Rayner, who hated the baptismal name as much as did her sister, and used it only when she desired to be especially and desperately impressive: "I found it by accident. I never dreamed of such a possibility as this. I never, even after what I have seen and heard, could have believed you guilty of this; but, now that I have found it, I have the right to ask, what are its contents?"

"I decline to tell you."

"Do you deny my right to inquire?"

"I will not discuss that question now. The other is far graver. I will not tell you, Kate, except this: there is no word there that an engaged girl should not write."

"Of that I mean to satisfy myself, or rather——"

"You will not open it, Kate. No! Put that letter down! You have never known me to prevaricate in the faintest degree, and you have no excuse for doubting. I will furnish a copy of that for Mr. Van Antwerp at any time; but you cannot see it."

"You still persist in your wicked and unnatural intimacy with that man, even after all that I have told you. Now for the last time hear me: I have striven not to tell you this; I have striven not to sully your thoughts by such a revelation; but, since nothing else will check you, tell it I must, and what I tell you my husband told me in sacred confidence, though soon enough it will be a scandal to the whole garrison."

And when darkness settled down on Fort Warrener that starlit April evening and the first warm breeze from the south came sighing about the casements and one by one the lights appeared along officers' row, there was no light in Nellie Travers's window. The little note lay in ashes on the hearth, and she, with burning, shame-stricken cheeks,

with a black, scorching, gnawing pain at her heart, was hiding her face in her pillow.

And yet it was a jolly evening, after all,—that is, for some hours and for some people. As Mrs. Rayner and her sister were so soon to go, probably by the morrow's train if their section could be secured, the garrison had decided to have an informal dance as a suitable farewell. Their announcement of impending departure had come so suddenly and unexpectedly that there was no time to prepare anything elaborate, such as a german with favors, etc.; but good music and an extemporized supper could be had without trouble. The colonel's wife and most of the cavalry ladies, on consultation, had decided that it was the very thing to do, and the young officers took hold with a will: they were always ready for a dance. Now that Mrs. Rayner was really going, the quarrel should be ignored, and the ladies would all be as pleasant to her as though nothing had happened,—provided, of course, she dropped her absurd airs of injured womanhood and behaved with courtesy. The colonel had had a brief talk with his better half before starting for the train, and suggested that it was very probable that Mrs. Rayner had seen the folly of her ways by that time,—the captain certainly had been behaving as though he regretted the estrangement,—and if encouraged by a "let's-drop-the-whole-thing" sort of manner she would be glad to reciprocate. He felt far less anxiety herein than he did in leaving the post to the command of Captain Buxton. So scrupulously had he been courteous to that intractable veteran that Buxton had no doubt in his own mind that the colonel looked upon him as the model officer of the regiment. It was singularly unfortunate that he should have to be left in command, but his one or two seniors among the captains were away on long leave, and there was no help for it. The colonel, seriously disquieted, had a few words of earnest talk with him before leaving the post, cautioning him so particularly not to interfere with any of the established details and customs that Buxton got very much annoyed, and showed it.

"If your evidence were not imperatively necessary before this court, I declare I believe I'd leave you behind," said the colonel to his adjutant. "There is no telling what mischief Captain Buxton won't do if left to himself."

It must have been near midnight, and the hop was going along beautifully, and Captain Rayner, who was officer of the day, was just escorting his wife in to supper, and Nellie, although looking a trifle tired and pale, was chatting brightly with a knot of young officers, when a corporal of the guard came to the door: "The commanding officer's compliments, and he desires to see the officer of the day at once."

There was a general laugh. "Isn't that Buxton all over? The colonel would never think of sending for an officer in the dead of night, except for a fire or alarm; but old Bux. begins putting on frills the moment he gets a chance. Thank God, *I'm* not on guard to-night!" said Mr. Royce.

"What *can* he want with you?" asked Mrs. Rayner, pettishly. "The idea of one captain ordering another around like this!"

"I'll be back in five minutes," said Rayner, as he picked up his sword and disappeared.

But ten minutes—fifteen—passed, and he came not. Mrs. Rayner grew worried, and Mr. Blake led her out on the rude piazza to see what they could see, and several others strolled out at the same time. The music had ceased, and the night air was not too cold. Not a soul was in sight out on the starlit parade. Not an unusual sound was heard. There was nothing to indicate the faintest trouble; and yet Captain Buxton, the commanding officer, had been called out by his "striker" or soldier-servant before eleven o'clock, had not returned at all, and in little over half an hour had sent for the officer of the day. What did it mean? Questioning and talking thus among themselves, somebody said, "Hark!" and held up a warning hand.

Faint, far, muffled, there sounded on the night air a shot, then a woman's scream; then all was still.

"Mrs. Clancy again!" said one.

"That was not Mrs. Clancy: 'twas a far different voice," answered Blake, and tore away across the parade as fast as his long legs would carry him.

"Look! The guard are running too!" cried Mrs. Waldron. "What can it be?" And, sure enough, the gleam of the rifles could be seen as the men ran rapidly away in the direction of the east gate. Mrs. Rayner had grown ghastly, and was looking at Miss Travers, who with white lips and clinched hands stood leaning on one of the wooden posts and gazing with all her eyes across the dim level. Others came hurrying out from the hall. Other young officers ran in pursuit of the first starters. "What's the matter? What's happened?" were the questions that flew from lip to lip.

"I—I must go home," faltered Mrs. Rayner. "Come, Nellie!"

"Oh, don't go, Mrs. Rayner. It can't be anything serious."

But, even as they urged, a man came running towards them.

"Is the doctor here?" he panted.

"Yes. What's the trouble?" asked Dr. Pease, as he squeezed his burly form through the crowded door-way.

"You're wanted, sir. Loot'nant Hayne's shot; an' Captain Rayner he's hurt too, sir."

XV.

Straight as an arrow Mr. Blake had sped across the parade, darted through the east gate, and, turning, had arrived breathless at the wooden porch of Hayne's quarters. Two bewildered-looking members of the guard were at the door. Blake pushed his way through the little hall-way and into the dimly-lighted parlor, where a strange scene met his eyes: Lieutenant Hayne lay senseless and white upon the lounge across the room; a young and pretty woman, singularly like him in feature and in the color of her abundant tresses, was kneeling beside him, chafing his hands, imploring him to speak,—to look at her,—unmindful of the fact that her feet were bare and that only a loose wrapper was thrown over her white night-dress; Captain Rayner was seated in a chair, deathly white, and striving to stanch the blood that flowed from a deep gash

in his temple and forehead; he seemed still stunned as by the force of the blow that had felled him; and Buxton, speechless with amaze and heaven only knows what other emotions, was glaring at a tall, athletic stranger who, in stocking-feet, undershirt, and trousers, held by three frightened-looking soldiers and covered by the carbine of a fourth, was hurling defiance and denunciation at the commanding officer. A revolver lay upon the floor at the feet of a corporal of the guard, who was groaning in pain. A thin veil of powder-smoke floated through the room. As Blake leaped in,—his cavalry shoulder-knots and helmet-cords gleaming in the light,—a flash of recognition shot into the stranger's eyes, and he curbed his fearful excitement and stopped short in his wrath.

"What devil's work is this?" demanded Blake, glaring intuitively at Buxton.

"These people resisted my guards, and had to take the consequences," said Buxton, with surly—yet shaken—dignity.

"What were the guards doing here? What, in God's name, are *you* doing here?" demanded Blake, forgetful of all consideration of rank and command in the face of such evident catastrophe.

"I *ordered* them here,—to enter and search."

A pause.

"Search what?—what for?"

"For—a woman I had reason to believe he had brought out here from town."

"*What?* You infernal idiot! Why, she's his own sister, and this gentleman's wife!"

The silence, broken only by the hard breathing of some of the excited men and the moaning cry of the woman, was for a moment intense.

"Isn't this Mr. Hurley?" asked Blake, suddenly, as though to make sure, and turning one instant from his furious glare at his superior officer. The stranger, still held, though no longer struggling, replied between his set teeth,—

"Certainly. I've told him so."

"By heaven, Buxton, is there no limit to your asininity? What fearful work will you do next?"

"I'll arrest *you*, sir, if you speak another disrespectful word!" thundered Buxton, recovering consciousness that as commanding officer he could defend himself against Blake's assault.

"Do it and be—— you know what I *would* say if a lady were not present! Do it, if you think you can stand having this thing ventilated by a court. Pah! I can't waste words on you. Who's gone for the doctor? Here, you men, let go of Mr. Hurley now. Help me, Mr. Hurley, please. Get your wife back to her room. Bring me some water, one of you." And with that he was bending over Hayne and unbuttoning the fatigue-uniform in which he was still dressed. Another moment, and the doctor had come in, and with him half the young officers of the garrison. Rayner was led away to his own quarters. Buxton, dazed and frightened now, ordered the guards back to their post, and stood pondering over the enormity of his blunder. No one spoke to him or paid the faintest attention other than to elbow him out

of the way occasionally. The doctor never so much as noticed him. Blake had briefly recounted the catastrophe to those who first arrived, and as the story went from mouth to mouth it grew no better for Buxton. Once he turned short on Mr. Foster and in aggrieved and sullen tone remarked,—

"I thought you fellows in the Riflers said he had no relations."

"We weren't apt to be invited to meet them if he had; but I don't know that anybody was in position to know anything about it. What's that got to do with this affair, I'd like to hear?"

At last somebody took him home. Mrs. Waldron, meantime, had arrived and been admitted to Mrs. Hurley's room. The doctor refused to go to Captain Rayner's, even when a messenger came from Mrs. Rayner herself. He referred her to his assistant, Dr. Grimes. Hayne had regained consciousness, but was sorely shaken. He had been floored by a blow from the butt of a musket; but the report that he was shot proved happily untrue. His right hand still lay near the hilt of his light sword: there was little question that he had raised his weapon against a superior officer and would have used it with telling effect.

Few people slept that night along officers' row. Never had Warrener heard of such excitement. Buxton knew not what to do. He paced the floor in agony of mind, for he well understood that there was no shirking the responsibility. From beginning to end he was the cause of the whole catastrophe. He had gone so far as to order his corporal to fire, and he knew it could be proved against him. Thank God, the perplexed corporal had shot high, and the other men, barring the one who had saved Rayner from a furious lunge of the lieutenant's sword, had used their weapons as gingerly and reluctantly as possible. At the very least, he knew, an investigation and fearful scandal must come of it. Night though it was, he sent for the acting adjutant and several of his brother captains, and, setting refreshments before them, besought their advice. He was still commanding officer *de jure*, but he had lost all stomach for its functions. He would have been glad to send for Blake and beg his pardon for submitting to his insubordinate and abusive language, if that course could have stopped inquiry; but he well knew that the whole thing would be noised abroad in less than no time. At first he thought to give orders against the telegraph-operator's sending any messages concerning the matter; but that would have been only a temporary hinderance: he could not control the instruments and operators in town, only three miles away. He almost wished he had been knocked down, shot, or stabbed in the *mêlée;* but he had kept in the rear when the skirmish began, and Rayner and the corporal were the sufferers. They had been knocked "endwise" by Mr. Hurley's practised fists after Hayne was struck down by the corporal's musket. It was the universal sentiment among the officers of the —th as they scattered to their homes that Buxton had "wound himself up this time, anyhow;" and no one had any sympathy for him,—not one. The very best light in which he could tell the story only showed the affair as a flagrant and inexcusable outrage.

Captain Rayner, too, was in fearful plight. He had simply obeyed orders; but all the old story of his persecution of Hayne would now be

revived; all men would see in his participation in the affair only additional reason to adjudge him cruelly persistent in his hatred of the young officer, and, in view of the utter ruthlessness and wrong of this assault, would be more than ever confident of the falsity of his position in the original case. As he was slowly led up-stairs to his room and his tearful wife and silent sister-in-law bathed and cleansed his wound, he saw with frightful clearness how the crush of circumstances was now upon him and his good name. Great heaven! how those words of Hayne's five years before rang, throbbed, burned, beat like trip-hammers through his whirling brain! It seemed as though they followed him and his fortunes like a curse. He sat silent, stunned, awe-stricken at the force of the calamity that had befallen him. How could he ever induce an officer and a gentleman to believe that he was no instigator in this matter?—that it was all Buxton's doing, Buxton's low imagination that had conceived the possibility of such a crime on the part of Mr. Hayne, and Buxton's blundering, bull-headed abuse of authority that had capped the fatal climax? It was some time before his wife could get him to speak at all. She was hysterically bemoaning the fate that had brought them into contact with such people, and from time to time giving vent to the comforting assertion that never had there been a cloud on their domestic or regimental sky until that wretch had been assigned to the Riflers. She knew from the hurried and guarded explanations of Dr. Grimes and one or two young officers who helped Rayner home that the fracas had occurred at Mr. Hayne's,—that there had been a mistake for which her husband was not responsible, but that Captain Buxton was entirely to blame. But her husband's ashen face told her a story of something far deeper: she knew that now he was involved in fearful trouble, and, whatever may have been her innermost thoughts, it was the first and irresistible impulse to throw all the blame upon her scapegoat. Miss Travers, almost as pale and quite as silent as the captain, was busying herself in helping her sister; but she could with difficulty restrain her longing to bid her be silent. She, too, had endeavored to learn from her escort on their hurried homeward rush across the parade what the nature of the disturbance had been. She, too, had suggested Clancy, but the officer by her side set his teeth as he replied that he wished it had been Clancy. She had heard, too, the message brought by a cavalry trumpeter from Mr. Blake: he wanted Captain Ray to come to Mr. Hayne's as soon as he had seen Mrs. Ray safely home, and would he please ask Mrs. Stannard to come with him at the same time? Why should Mr. Blake want Mrs. Stannard at Mr. Hayne's? She saw Mr. Foster run up and speak a few words to Mrs. Waldron, and heard that lady reply, "Certainly. I will go with you now." What could it mean? At last, as she was returning to her sister's room after a moment's absence, she heard a question at which her heart stood still. It was Mrs. Rayner who asked,—

"But the creature was there, was she not?"

The answer sounded more like a moan of anguish:

"The creature was his sister. It was her husband who——"

But, as Captain Rayner buried his battered face in his hands at this juncture, the rest of the sentence was inaudible. Miss Travers had

heard quite enough, however. She stood there one moment, appalled, dropped upon the floor the bandage she had been making, turned and sought her room, and was seen no more that night.

Over the day or two that followed this affair the veil of silence may best be drawn, in order to give time for the sediment of truth to settle through the whirlpool of stories in violent circulation. The colonel came back on the first train after the adjournment of the court, and could hardly wait for that formality. Contrary to his custom of "sleeping on" a question, he was in his office within half an hour after his return to the post, and from that time until near tattoo was busily occupied taking the statements of the active participants in the affair. This was three days after its occurrence; and Captain Rayner, though up and able to be about, had not left his quarters. Mrs. Rayner had abandoned her trip to the East, for the present at least. Mr. Hayne still lay weak and prostrate in his darkened room, attended hourly by Dr. Pease, who feared brain-fever, and nursed assiduously by Mrs. Hurley, for whom Mrs. Waldron, Mrs. Stannard, and many other ladies in the garrison could not do enough to content themselves. Mr. Hurley's wrist was badly sprained and in a sling; but the colonel went purposely to call upon him and to shake his other hand, and he begged to be permitted to see Mrs. Hurley, who came in pale and soft-eyed and with a gentle demeanor that touched the colonel more than he could tell. Her cheek flushed for a moment as he bent low over her hand and told her how bitterly he regretted that his absence from the post had resulted in so grievous an experience: it was not the welcome he and his regiment would have given her had they known of her intended visit. To Mr. Hurley he briefly said that he need not fear but that full justice would be meted out to the instigator or instigators of the assault; but, as a something to make partial amends for their suffering, he said that nothing now could check the turn of the tide in their brother's favor. All the cavalry officers except Buxton, all the infantry officers except Rayner, had already been to call upon him since the night of the occurrence, and had striven to show how distressed they were over the outrageous blunders of their temporary commander. Buxton had written a note expressive of a desire to see him and "explain," but was informed that explanations from him simply aggravated the injury; and Rayner, crushed and humiliated, was fairly in hiding in his room, too sick at heart to want to see anybody, and waiting for the action of the authorities in the confident expectation that nothing less than court-martial and disgrace would be his share of the outcome. He would gladly have resigned and gone at once, but that would have been resigning under virtual charges: he *had* to stay, and his wife had to stay with him, and Nellie with her. By this time Nellie Travers did not want to go. She had but one thought now,—to make amends to Mr. Hayne for the wrong her thoughts had done him. It was time for Mr. Van Antwerp to come to the wide West and look after his interests; but Mrs. Rayner had ceased to urge, while he continued to implore her to bring Nellie East at once. Almost any man as rich and independent as Steven Van Antwerp would have gone to the scene and settled matters for himself.

Singularly enough, this one solution of the problem seemed never to occur to him as feasible.

Meantime, the colonel had patiently unravelled the threads and had brought to light the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It made a singularly simple story, after all; but that was so much the worse for Buxton. The only near relation Mr. Hayne had in the world was this one younger sister, who six years before had married a manly, energetic fellow, a civil engineer in the employ of an Eastern railway. During Hayne's "mountain-station" exile Hurley had brought his wife to Denver, where far better prospects awaited him. He won promotion in his profession, and was now one of the principal engineers employed by a road running new lines through the Colorado Rockies. Journeying to Salt Lake, he came around by way of Warrener, so that his wife and he might have a look at the brother she had not seen in years. Their train was due there early in the afternoon, but was blocked by drifts and did not reach the station until late at night. There they found a note from him begging them to take a carriage they would find waiting for them and come right out and spend the night at his quarters: he would send them back in abundant time to catch the westward train in the morning. He could not come in, because that involved the necessity of asking his captain's permission, and they knew his relations with that captain. It was her shadow Buxton had seen on the window-screen; and as none of Buxton's acquaintances had ever mentioned that Hayne had any relations, and as Hayne, in fact, had had no one for years to talk to about his personal affairs, nobody but himself and the telegraph-operator at the post really knew of their sudden visit. Buxton, being an unmitigated cad, had put the worst interpretation on his discovery, and, in his eagerness to clinch the evidence of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman upon Mr. Hayne, had taken no wise head into his confidence. Never dreaming that the shadow could be that of a blood-relation, never doubting that a fair, frail companion from the frontier town was the explanation of Mr. Hayne's preference for that out-of-the way house and late hours, he stated his discovery to Rayner as a positive fact, going so far as to say that his sentries had recognized her as she drove away in the carriage. If he had not been an ass as well as a cad, he would have interviewed the driver of the carriage; but he had jumped at his theory, and his sudden elevation to the command of the post gave him opportunity to carry out his virtuous determination that no such goings-on should disgrace his administration. He gave instructions to certain soldier clerks and "daily-duty" men employed in the quartermaster, commissary, and ordnance offices along Prairie Avenue to keep their eyes open and let him know of any visitors coming out to Hayne's by night, and if a lady came in a carriage he was to be called at once. Mr. Hurley promised that on their return from Salt Lake they would come back by way of Warrener and spend two days with Hayne, since only an hour or two had they enjoyed of his company on their way West; and the very day that the officers went off to the court came the telegram saying the Hurleys would arrive that evening. Hayne had already talked over their prospective visit with Major Waldron, and the latter had told his wife; but all intercourse

of a friendly character was at an end between them and the Rayners and Buxtons; there were no more gossipy chats among the ladies. Indeed, it so happened that only to one or two people had Mrs. Waldron had time to mention that Mr. Hayne's sister was coming, and neither the Rayners nor Buxtons had heard of it; neither had Nellie Travers, for it was after the evening of her last visit that Mrs. Waldron was told.

Hayne ran with his telegram to the major, and the latter had introduced himself and Major Stannard to Mrs. Hurley when, after a weary wait of some hours, the train arrived. Blake, too, was there, on the lookout for some friends, and he was presented to Mrs. Hurley while her husband was attending to some matters about the baggage. The train went on eastward, carrying the field-officers with it. Blake had to go with his friends back to the post, and Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, after the former had attended to some business and seen some railway associates of his at the hotel, took the carriage they had had before and drove out to the garrison, where Private Schweinkopf saw the lady rapturously welcomed by Lieutenant Hayne and escorted into the house, while Mr. Hurley remained settling with the driver out in the darkness. It was not long before the commanding officer *pro tem.* was called from the hop-room, where the dance was going on delightfully, and notified that the mysterious visitor had again appeared, with evident intention of spending the night, as the carriage had returned to town. "Why, certainly," reasoned Buxton. "It's the very night he would choose, since everybody will be at the hop: no one will be apt to interfere, and everybody will be unusually drowsy and less inclined to take notice in the morning." Here was ample opportunity for a brilliant stroke of work. He would first satisfy himself she was there, then surround the house with sentries so that she could not escape, while he, with the officer of the day and the corporal of the guard, entered the house and confronted him and her. *That* would wind up Mr. Hayne's career beyond question: nothing short of dismissal could result. Over he went, full of his project, listened at Hayne's like the eavesdropping sneak he was, saw again the shadow of the graceful form and heard the silvery, happy laugh, and then it was he sent for Rayner. It was near midnight when he led his forces to the attack. A light was now burning in the second story, which he thought must be Sam's; but the lights had been turned low in the parlor, and the occupants had disappeared from sight and hearing. By inquiry he had ascertained that Hayne's bedroom was just back of the parlor. A man was stationed at the back door, others at the sides, with orders to arrest any one who attempted to escape; then softly he stepped to the front door, telling Rayner to follow him, and the corporal of the guard to follow both. To his surprise, the door was unlocked, and a light was burning in the hall. Never knocking, he stepped in, marched through the hall into the parlor, which was empty, and, signalling "Come on" to his followers, crossed the parlor and seized the knob of the bedroom door. It was locked. Rayner, looking white and worried, stood just behind him, and the corporal but a step farther back. Before Buxton could knock and demand admission, which was his intention, quick footsteps came flying down the stairs from the second

story, and the trio wheeled about in surprise, to find Mr. Hayne, dressed in his fatigue uniform, standing at the threshold and staring at them with mingled astonishment, incredulity, and indignation. A sudden light seemed to dawn upon him as he glanced from one to the other. With a leap like a cat he threw himself upon Buxton, hurled him back, and stood at the closed door confronting them with blazing eyes and clinching fists.

"Open that door, sir!" cried Buxton. "You have a woman hidden there. Open, or stand aside."

"You hounds! I'll kill the first man who dares enter!" was the furious answer; and Hayne had snatched from the wall his long infantry sword and flashed the blade in the lamplight. Rayner made a step forward, half irresolute. Hayne leaped at him like a tiger. "Fire! Quick!" shouted Buxton, in wild excitement. Bang! went the carbine, and the bullet crashed through the plaster overhead, and, seeing the gleaming steel at his superior's throat, the corporal had sent the heavy butt crashing upon the lieutenant's skull only just in time: there would have been murder in another second. The next instant he was standing on his own head in the corner, seeing a multitude of twinkling, whirling stars, from the midst of which Captain Rayner was reeling backward over a chair and a number of soldiers were rushing upon a powerful picture of furious manhood,—a stranger in shirt-sleeves, who had leaped from the bedroom.

Told as it was—as it had to be—all over the department, there seemed but one thing to say, and that referred to Buxton: "Well! *isn't* he a phenomenal ass?"

XVI.

Mr. Hayne was up and around again. The springtime was coming, and the prairie roads were good and dry, and the doctor had told him he must live in the open air awhile and ride and walk and drive. He stood in no want of "mounts," for three or four of his cavalry friends were ready to lend him a saddle-horse any day. Mr. and Mrs. Hurley, after making many pleasant acquaintances, had gone on to Denver, and Captain Buxton was congratulating himself that he, at least, had not run foul of the engineer's powerful fists. Buxton was not in arrest, for the case had proved a singular "poser." It occurred during the temporary absence of the colonel: *he* could not well place the captain under arrest for things he had done when acting as post commander. In obedience to his orders from department head-quarters, he made his report of the affair, and indicated that Captain Buxton's conduct had been inexcusable. Rayner had done nothing but, as was proved, reluctantly obey the captain's orders, so he could not be tried. Hayne, who had committed one of the most serious crimes in the military catalogue,—that of drawing and raising a weapon against an officer who was in discharge of his duty (Rayner),—had the sympathy of the whole command, and nobody would prefer charges against him. The general decided to have the report go up to division head-quarters, and thence it went with its varied comments and endorsements to Washington;

and now a court of inquiry was talked of. Meantime, poor bewildered Buxton was let severely alone. What made him utterly miserable was the fact that in his own regiment, the —th, nobody spoke of it except as something that everybody knew was sure to happen the moment he got in command. If it hadn't been that 'twould have been something else. The only certainty was that Buxton would never lose a chance of making an ass of himself. Instead of being furious with him, the whole regiment—officers and men—simply ridiculed and laughed at him. He had talked of preferring charges against Blake for insubordination, and asked the adjutant what he thought of it. It was the first time he had spoken to the adjutant for weeks, and the adjutant rushed out of the office to tell the crowd to come in and "hear Buxton's latest." It began to look as though nothing serious would ever come of the affair, until Rayner reappeared and people saw how very ill he was. Dr. Pease had been consulted; and it was settled that he as well as his wife must go away for several months and have complete rest and change. It was decided that they would leave by the 1st of May. All this Mr. Hayne heard through his kind friend Mrs. Waldron.

One day when he first began to sit up, and before he had been out at all, she came and sat with him in his sunshiny parlor. There had been a silence for a moment as she looked around upon the few pictures and upon that bareness and coldness which, do what he will, no man can eradicate from his abiding-place until he calls in the deft and dainty hand of woman.

"I shall be so glad when you have a wife, Mr. Hayne!" was her quiet comment.

"So shall I, Mrs. Waldron," was the response.

"And isn't it high time we were beginning to hear of a choice? Forgive my intrusiveness, but that was the very matter of which the major and I were talking as he brought me over."

"There is something to be done first, Mrs. Waldron," he answered. "I cannot offer any woman a clouded name. It is not enough that people should begin to believe that I was innocent and my persecutors utterly in error, if not perjured. I must be able to show who was the real culprit, and that is not easy. The doctor and I thought we saw a way not long ago; but it proved delusive." And he sighed deeply. "I had expected to see the major about it the very day he got back from the court; but we have had no chance to talk."

"Mr. Hayne," she said, impulsively, "a woman's intuition is not always at fault. Tell me if you believe that any one on the post has any inkling of the truth. I have a reason for asking."

"I *did* think it possible, Mrs. Waldron. I cannot be certain now; and it's too late, anyway."

"How, too late? What's too late?"

He paused a moment, a deeper shadow than usual on his face; then he lifted his head and looked fairly at her:

"I should not have said that, Mrs. Waldron. It can never be too late. But what I mean is that—just now I spoke of offering no woman a clouded name. Even if it were unclouded, I could not offer it where I would."

"Because you have heard of the engagement?" was the quick, eager question. There was no instant of doubt in the woman as to where the offering would be made, if it only could.

"I knew of the engagement only a day ago," he answered, with stern effort at self-control. "Blake was speaking of her, and it came out all of a sudden."

He turned his head away again. It was more than Mrs. Waldron could stand. She leaned impetuously towards him, and put her hand on his:

"Mr. Hayne, that is no engagement of heart to heart. It is entirely a thing of Mrs. Rayner's doing; and I *know* it. She is poor,—dependent,—and has been simply sold into bondage."

"And you think she cares nothing for the position, the wealth and social advantages, this would give her? Ah, Mrs. Waldron, consider."

"I *have* considered. Mr. Hayne, if I were a man, like you, that child should never go back to him. And they are going next week. You *must* get well."

It was remarked that Mr. Hayne was out surprisingly quick for a fellow who had been so recently threatened with brain-fever. The Rayners were to go East at once, so it was said, though the captain's leave of absence had not yet been ordered. The colonel could grant him seven days at any time, and he had telegraphic notification that there would be no objection when the formal application reached the War Department. Rayner called at the colonel's office and asked that he might be permitted to start with his wife and sister. His second lieutenant would move in and occupy his quarters and take care of all his personal effects during their absence; and Lieutenant Hayne was a most thorough officer, and he felt that in turning over his company to him he left it in excellent hands. The colonel saw the misery in the captain's face, and he was touched by both looks and words:

"You must not take this last affair too much to heart, Captain Rayner. We in the —th have known Captain Buxton so many years that with us there is no question as to where all the blame lies. It seems, too, to be clearly understood by Mr. Hayne. As for your previous ideas of that officer, I consider it too delicate a matter to speak of. You must see, however, how entirely beyond reproach his general character appears to have been. But here's another matter: Clancy's discharge has arrived. Does the old fellow know you had requested it?"

"No, sir," answered Rayner, with hesitation and embarrassment. "We wanted to keep him straight, as I told you we would, and he would probably get on a big tear if he knew his service-days were numbered. I didn't look for its being granted for forty-eight hours yet."

"Well, he will know it before night; and no doubt he will be badly cut up. Clancy was a fine soldier before he married that harridan of a woman."

"She has made him a good wife since they came into the Riflers, colonel, and has taken mighty good care of the old fellow."

"It is more than she did in the —th, sir. She was a handsome,

showy woman when I first saw her,—before my promotion to the regiment,—and Clancy was one of the finest soldiers in the brigade the last year of the war. She ran through all his money, though, and in the —th we looked upon her as the real cause of his break-down,—especially after her affair with that sergeant who deserted. You've heard of him, probably. He disappeared after the Battle Butte campaign, and we hoped he'd run off with Mrs. Clancy; but he hadn't. She was there when we got back, big as ever, and growing ugly."

"Do you mean that Mrs. Clancy had a lover when she was in the —th?"

"Certainly, Captain Rayner. We supposed it was commonly known. He was a fine-looking, black-eyed, dark-haired, dashing fellow, of good education, a great swell among the men the short time he was with us, and Mrs. Clancy made a dead set at him from the start. He never seemed to care for *her* very much."

"This is something I never heard of," said Rayner, with grave face, "and it will be a good deal of a shock to my wife, for she had arranged to take her East with Clancy and Kate, and they were to invest their money in some little business at her old home."

"Yes: it was mainly on the woman's account we wouldn't re-enlist Clancy in the —th. We could stand *him*, but she was too much for us, —and for the other sergeant, too. He avoided her before we started on the campaign, I fancy. Odd! I can't think of his name.—Billings, what was the name of that howling swell of a sergeant who was in Hull's troop at Battle Butte,—time Hull was killed? I mean the man that Mrs. Clancy was said to have eloped with."

"Sergeant Gower, sir," said the adjutant, without looking up from his work. He did look up, however, when a moment after the captain hurriedly left the office, and he saw that Rayner's face was deathly white: it was ghastly.

"What took Rayner off so suddenly?" said the colonel, wheeling around in his chair.

"I don't know, sir, unless there was something to startle him in the name."

"Why should there be?"

"There are those who think that Gower got away with more than his horse and arms, colonel: he was not at Battle Butte, though, and that is what made it a mystery."

"Where was he then?"

"Back with the wagon-train, sir; and he never got in sight of the Buttes or Rayner's battalion. You know Rayner had four companies there."

"I don't see how Gower could have taken the money, if that's what you mean, if he never came up to the Buttes: Rayner swore it was there in Hull's original package. Then, too, how could Gower's name affect him if he had never seen him?"

"Possibly he has heard something. Clancy has been talking."

"I have looked into that," said the colonel. "Clancy denies knowing anything,—says he was drunk and didn't know what he was talking about."

All the same it was queer, thought the adjutant, and he greatly wanted to see the doctor and talk with him; but by the time his office-work was done the doctor had gone to town, and when he came back he was sent for to the laundress's quarters, where Mrs. Clancy was in hysterics and Michael had again been very bad.

Soon after the captain's return to his quarters, it seems, a messenger was sent from Mrs. Rayner requesting Mrs. Clancy to come and see her at once. She was ushered up-stairs to madame's own apartment, much to Miss Travers's surprise, and that young lady was further astonished, when Mrs. Clancy reappeared, nearly an hour later, to see that she had been weeping violently. The house was in some disorder, most of the trunks being packed and in readiness for the start, and Miss Travers was entertaining two or three young officers and waiting for her sister to come down to luncheon. "The boys" were lachrymose over her prospective departure,—at least they affected to be,—and were variously sprawled about the parlor when Mrs. Clancy descended, and the inflamed condition of her eyes and nose became apparent to all. There was much chaff and fun, therefore, when Mrs. Rayner finally appeared, over the supposed affliction of the big Irishwoman at the prospect of parting with her patroness. Miss Travers saw with singular sensations that both the captain and her usually self-reliant sister were annoyed and embarrassed by the topic and strove to change it; but Foster's propensity for mimicry and his ability to imitate Mrs. Clancy's combined brogue and sniffle proved too much for their efforts. Kate was in a royally bad temper by the time the youngsters left the house, and when Nellie would have made some laughing allusion to the fun the young fellows had been having over her morning caller, she was suddenly and tartly checked with—

"We've had too much of that already. Just understand now that you have no time to waste, if your packing is unfinished. We start to-morrow afternoon."

"Why, Kate! I had no idea we were to go for two days yet! Of course I can be ready; but why did you not tell me before?"

"I did not know it—at least it was not decided—until this morning, after the captain came back from the office. There is nothing to prevent our going, now that he has seen the colonel."

"There was not before, Kate; for Mr. Billings told me yesterday morning, and I told you, that the colonel had said you could start at once, and you replied that the captain could not be ready for several days,—three at least."

"Well, now he *is;* and that ends it. Never mind what changed his mind."

It was unsafe to trifle with Nellie Travers, as Mrs. Rayner might have known. She saw that something had occurred to make the captain eager to start at once; and then there was that immediate sending for Mrs. Clancy, the long, secret talk up in Kate's room, the evident mental disturbance of both feminines on their respective reappearances, and the sudden announcement to her. While there could be no time to make formal parting calls, there were still some two or three ladies in the garrison whom she longed to see before saying adieu; and then

there was Mr. Hayne, whom she had wronged quite as bitterly as anyone else had wronged him. He was out that day for the first time, and she longed to see him and longed to fulfil the neglected promise. *That* she must do at the very least. If she could not see him, she must write, that he might have the note before they went away. All these thoughts were rushing through her brain as she busied herself about her little room, stowing away dresses and dropping everything from time to time to dart into her sister's room in answer to some querulous call. Yet never did she leave without a quick glance from her window up and down the row. For whom was she looking?

It was just about dusk when she heard crying down-stairs,—a child, and apparently in the kitchen. Mrs. Rayner was with the baby, and Miss Travers started for the stairs, calling that she would go and see what it meant. She was down in the hall before Mrs. Rayner's imperative and repeated calls brought her to a full stop.

"What is it?" she inquired.

"You come back here and hold baby. I know perfectly what it is. It is Kate Clancy; and she wants me. You can do nothing."

Too late, madame! The intervening doors were opened, and in marched cook, leading the poor little Irish girl, who was sobbing piteously. Mrs. Rayner came down the stairs with all speed, bringing her burly son and heir in her arms. She would have ordered Nell aloft, but what excuse could she give? and Miss Travers was already bending over the child and striving to still her heart-breaking cries.

"What is it? Where's your father?" demanded Mrs. Rayner.

"Oh, ma'am, I don't know. I came here to tell the captain. Shure he's discharged, ma'am, an' his heart's broke entirely, an' mother says we're all to go with the captain to-morrow, an' he swears he'll kill himself before he'll go, an' I can't find him, ma'am. It's almost dark now."

"Go back and tell your mother I want her instantly. We'll find your father. Go!" she repeated, as the child shrank and hesitated. "Here,—the front way!" And little Kate sped away into the shadows across the dim level of the parade.

Then the sisters faced each other. There was a fire in the younger's eye that Mrs. Rayner would have escaped if she could.

"Kate, it is to get Clancy away from the possibility of revealing what he knows that you have planned this sudden move, and I *know* it," said Miss Travers. "You need not answer."

She seized a wrap from the hat-rack and stepped to the door-way. Mrs. Rayner threw herself after her.

"Nellie, where are you going? What will you do?"

"To Mrs. Waldron's, Kate; if need be, to Mr. Hayne's."

* * * * * * * * * * *

A bright fire was burning in Major Waldron's cosey parlor, where he and his good wife were seated in earnest talk. It was just after sunset when Mr. Hayne dropped in to pay his first visit after the few days in which he had been confined to his quarters. He was looking thin, paler than usual, and far more restless and eager in manner than of old. The Waldrons welcomed him with more than usual warmth,

and the major speedily led the conversation up to the topic which was so near to his heart.

"You and I must see the doctor and have a triangular council over this thing, Hayne. Three heads are better than none; and if, as he suspects, old Clancy really knows anything when he's drunk that he cannot tell when he's sober, I shall depart from Mrs. Waldron's principles and join the doctor in his pet scheme of getting him drunk again. '*In vino veritas*,' you know. And we ought to be about it, too, for it won't be long before his discharge comes, and, once away, we should be in the lurch."

"There seems so little hope there, major. Even the colonel has called him up and questioned him."

"Ay, very true, but always when the old sergeant was sober. It is when drunk that Clancy's conscience pricks him to tell what he either knows or suspects."

A light, quick footstep was heard on the piazza, the hall door opened, and without knock or ring, bursting impetuously in upon them, there suddenly appeared Miss Travers, her eyes dilated with excitement. At sight of the group she stopped short, and colored to the very roots of her shining hair.

"How glad I am to see you, Nellie!" exclaimed Mrs. Waldron, as all rose to greet her. An embarrassed, half-distraught reply was her only answer. She had extended both hands to the elder lady; but now, startled, almost stunned, at finding herself in the presence of the very man she most wanted to see, she stood with downcast eyes, irresolute. He, too, had not stepped forward,—had not offered his hand. She raised her blue eyes for one quick glance, and saw his pale, pain-thinned face, read anew the story of his patience, his suffering, his heroism, and realized how she too had wronged him and that her very awkwardness and silence might tell him that shameful fact. It was more than she could stand.

"I came—purposely. I hoped to find you, Mr. Hayne. You—you remember that I had something to tell you. It was about Clancy. You ought to see him. I'm sure you ought, for he *must* know—he or Mrs. Clancy—something about your—your trouble; and I've just this minute heard that they—that he's going away to-morrow; and you must find him to-night, Mr. Hayne: indeed you must."

Who can paint her as she stood there, blushing, pleading, eager, frightened, yet determined? Who can picture the wild emotion in his heart, reflected in his face? He stepped quickly to her side with the light leaping to his eyes, his hands extended as though to grasp hers; but it was Waldron that spoke first:

"Where is he going?—how?"

"Oh, with us, major. We go to-morrow, and they go with us. My sister has some reason—I cannot fathom it. She wants them away from here, and Clancy's discharge came to-day. He *must* see him first," she said, indicating Mr. Hayne by the nod of her pretty head. "They say Clancy has run off and got away from his wife. He doesn't want to be discharged. They cannot find him now; but perhaps Mr. Hayne can.—Mr. Hayne, try to. You—you must."

"Indeed we must, Hayne, and quick about it," said the major. "Now is our chance, I verily believe. Let us get the doctor first; then little Kate will best know where to look for Clancy. Come, man, get your overcoat." And he hastened to the hall.

Hayne followed as though in a dream, reached the threshold, turned, looked back, made one quick step toward Miss Travers with outstretched hand, then checked himself as suddenly. His yearning eyes seemed fastened on her burning face, his lips quivered with the intensity of his emotion. She raised her eyes and gave him one quick look, half entreaty, half command; he seemed ineffectually struggling to speak,—to thank her. One moment of irresolution, then, without a word of any kind, he sprang to the door. She carried his parting glance in her heart of hearts all night long. There was no mistaking what it told.

XVII.

The morning report of the following day showed some items under the head of "Alterations" that involved several of the soldier characters of this story. Ex-Sergeant Clancy had been dropped from the column of present "on daily duty" and taken up on that of absent without leave. Lieutenant Hayne was also reported absent. Dr. Pease and Lieutenant Billings drove into the garrison from town just before the cavalry trumpets were sounding first call for guard-mounting, and the adjutant sent one of the musicians to give his compliments to Mr. Royce and ask him to mount the guard for him, as he had just returned and had important business with the colonel. The doctor and the adjutant together went into the colonel's quarters, and for the first time on record the commanding officer was not at the desk in his office when the shoulder-straps began to gather for the *matinée*.

Ten minutes after the usual time the adjutant darted in and plunged with his characteristic impetuosity into the pile of passes and other papers stacked up by the sergeant-major at his table. To all questions as to where he had been and what was the matter with the colonel he replied, with more than usual asperity of manner,—the asperity engendered of some years of having to answer the host of questions propounded by vacant minds at his own busiest hour of the day,—that the colonel would tell them all about it himself; *he* had no time for a word. The evident manner of suppressed excitement, however, was something few failed to note; and every man in the room felt certain that when the colonel came there would be a revelation. It was with something bordering on indignation, therefore, that the assemblage heard the words that intimated to them that all might retire. The colonel had come in very quietly, received the report of the officer of the day, relieved him, and dismissed the new officer of the day with the brief formula, "Usual orders, sir," then glanced quickly around the silent circle of grave, bearded or boyish faces. His eyes rested for an instant with something like shock and trouble upon one face, pale, haggard, with almost bloodless lips, and yet full of fierce determination,—a face that haunted him long afterwards, it was so full of agony, of suspense, almost of pleading, —the face of Captain Rayner.

Then, dispensing with the customary talk, he quietly spoke the disappointing words,—

"I am somewhat late this morning, gentlemen, and several matters will occupy my attention: so I will not detain you further."

The crowd seemed to find their feet very slowly. There was visible disinclination to go. Every man in some inexplicable way appeared to know that there was a new mystery hanging over the garrison, and that the colonel held the key. Every man felt that Billings had given him the right to expect to be told all about it when the colonel came. Some looked reproachfully at Billings, as though to remind him of their expectations: Stannard, his old stand-by, passed him with a gruff "Thought you said the colonel had something to tell us," and went out with an air of injured and defrauded dignity. Rayner arose, and seemed to be making preparations to depart with the others, and some of the number, connecting him unerringly with the prevailing sensation, appeared to hold back and wait for him to precede them and so secure to themselves the satisfaction of knowing that, if it was a matter connected with Rayner, they "had him along" and nothing could take place without their hearing it. These men were very few, however; but Buxton was one of them. Rayner's eyes were fixed upon the colonel and searching for a sign, and it came,—a little motion of the hand and a nod of the head that signified "Stay." Then, as Buxton and one or two of his stamp still dallied irresolute, the colonel turned somewhat sharply to them: "Was there any matter on which you wished to see me, gentlemen?" and, as there was none, they *had* to go. Then Rayner was alone with the colonel; for Mr. Billings quickly arose, and, with a significant glance at his commander, left the room and closed the door.

Mrs. Rayner, gazing from her parlor windows, saw that all the officers had come out except one,—her husband,—and with a moan of misery she covered her face with her hands and sank upon the sofa. With cheeks as white as her sister's, with eyes full of trouble and perplexity, but tearless, Nellie Travers stepped quickly into the room and put a trembling white hand upon the other's shoulder:

"Kate, it is no time for so bitter an estrangement as this. I have done simply what our soldier father would have done had he been here. I am fully aware of what it must cost me. I knew when I did it that you would never again welcome me to your home. Once East again, you and I can go our ways; I won't burden you longer; but is it not better that you should tell me in what way your husband or you can have been injured by what I have done?"

Mrs. Rayner impatiently shook away the hand.

"I don't want to talk to you," was the blunt answer. "You have carried out your threat and—ruined *us:* that's all."

"What *can* you mean? Do you want me to think that because Mr. Hayne's innocence may be established your husband was the guilty man? Certainly your manner leads to that inference; though his does not, by any means."

"I don't want to talk, I tell you. You've had your way,—done your work. You'll see soon enough the hideous web of trouble you've

entangled about my husband. Don't you dare say—don't you dare think"—and now she rose with sudden fury—"that he was the—that he lost the money! But that's what all others will think."

"If that were true, Kate, there would be this difference between his trouble and Mr. Hayne's: Captain Rayner would have wife, wealth, and friends to help him bear the cross; Mr. Hayne has borne it five long years unaided. I pray God the truth *has* been brought to light."

What fierce reply Mrs. Rayner might have given, who knows? but at that instant a quick step was heard on the piazza, the door opened suddenly, and Captain Rayner entered with a rush. The pallor had gone; a light of eager, half-incredulous joy beamed from his eyes, he threw his cap upon the floor, and his wife had risen and thrown her arms about his neck.

"Have they found him?" was her breathless question. "*What* has happened? You look so different."

"Found him? Yes; and he has told everything?"

"Told—what?"

"Told that he and Gower were the men. They took it all."

"*Clancy!*—and Gower! The thieves, do you mean? Is that—is *that* what he confessed?" she asked, in wild wonderment, in almost stupefied amaze, releasing him from her arms and stepping back, her eyes searching his face.

"Nothing else in the world, Kate. I don't understand it at all. I'm all a-tremble yet. It clears Hayne utterly. It at least explains how I was mistaken. But what—what could she have meant?"

Mrs. Rayner stood like one in a dream, her eyes staring, her lips quivering; and Nellie, with throbbing pulses and clasping hands, looked eagerly from husband to wife, as though beseeching some explanation.

"What did she mean? What *did* she mean? I say again," asked Rayner, pressing his hand to his forehead and gazing fixedly at his wife.

A moment longer she stood there, as though a light—a long-hidden truth—were slowly forcing itself upon her mind. Then, with impulsive movement, she hurried through the dining-room, threw open the kitchen door, and startled the domestics at their late breakfast.

"Ryan," she called to the soldier-servant who rose hastily from the table, "go and tell Mrs. Clancy I want her instantly. Do you understand? Instantly!" And Ryan seized his forage-cap and vanished.

It was perhaps ten minutes before he returned. When he did so it was apparent that Mrs. Rayner had been crying copiously, and that Miss Travers, too, was much affected. The captain was pacing the room with nervous strides in mingled relief and agitation. All looked up expectant as the soldier re-entered. He had the air of a man who knew he bore tidings of vivid and mysterious interest, but he curbed the excitement of his manner until it shone only through his snapping eyes, saluted, and reported with professional gravity:

"Mrs. Clancy's clean gone, sir."

"Gone where?"

"Nobody knows, sir. She's just lit out with her trunk and best clothes some time last night."

"Gone to her husband in town, maybe?"

"No, sir. Clancy's all right: he was caught last evening, and hadn't time to get more'n half drunk before they lodged him. Lootenant Hayne got him, sir. They had him afore a justice of the peace early this morning——"

"Yes, I know all that. What I want is *Mrs.* Clancy. What has become of her?"

"Faith, I don't know, sir, but the women in Sudsville they all say she's run away, sir,—taken her money and gone. She's afraid of Clancy's peaching on her."

"By heavens! the thing is clearing itself!" exclaimed Rayner to his gasping and wild-eyed wife. "I must go to the colonel at once with his news." And away he went.

And then again, as the orderly retired, and the sisters were left alone, Nellie Travers with trembling lips asked the question,—

"Have I done so much harm, after all, Kate?"

"Oh, Nellie! Nellie! forgive me, for I have been nearly mad with misery!" was Mrs. Rayner's answer, as she burst into a fresh paroxysm of tears. "That—that woman has—has told me fearful lies."

There was a strange scene that day at Warrener when, towards noon, two carriages drove out from town and, entering the east gate, rolled over towards the guard-house. The soldiers clustered about the barrack porches and stared at the occupants. In the first—a livery hack from town—were two sheriff's officers, while cowering on the back seat, his hat pulled down over his eyes, was poor old Clancy, to whom clung faithful little Kate. In the rear carriage—Major Waldron's—were Mr. Hayne, the major, and a civilian whom some of the men had no difficulty in recognizing as the official charged with the administration of justice towards offenders against the peace. Many of the soldiers strolled slowly up the road, in hopes of hearing all about the arrest, and what it meant, from straggling members of the guard. All knew it meant something more than a mere "break" on the part of Clancy; all felt that it had some connection with the long-continued mystery that hung about the name of Lieutenant Hayne. Then, too, it was being noised abroad that Mrs. Clancy had "skipped" and between two suns had fled for parts unknown. *She* could be overhauled by telegraph if she had left on either of the night freights or gone down towards Denver by the early morning passenger-train; it would be easy enough to capture her if she were "wanted," said the garrison; but what did it mean that Clancy was pursued by officers of the post and brought back under charge of officers of the law? He had had trouble enough, poor fellow!

The officer of the guard looked wonderingly at the carriages and their occupants. He saluted Major Waldron as the latter stepped briskly down.

"You will take charge of Clancy, Mr. Graham," said the major. "His discharge will be recalled: at least it will not take effect to-day. You will be interested in knowing that his voluntary confession fully establishes Mr. Hayne's innocence of the charges on which he was tried."

Mr. Graham's face turned all manner of colors. He glanced at

Hayne, who, still seated in the carriage, was as calmly indifferent to him as ever: he was gazing across the wide parade at the windows in officers' row. Little Kate's sobs as the soldiers were helping her father from the carriage suddenly recalled his wandering thoughts. He sprang to the ground, stepped quickly to the child, and put his arms about her.

"Clancy, tell her to come with us. Mrs. Waldron will take loving care of her, and she shall come to see you every day. The guard-house is no place for her to follow you. Tell her so, man, and she will go with us.—Come, Katie, child!" And he bent tenderly over the sobbing little waif.

"Thank ye, sir. I know ye'll be good to her. Go with the lootenant, Kate darlin'; go. Shure I'll be happier then."

And, trembling, he bent and kissed her wet cheeks. She threw her arms around his neck and clung to him in an agony of grief. Gently they strove to disengage her clasping arms, but she shrieked and struggled, and poor old Clancy broke down. There were sturdy soldiers standing by who turned their heads away to hide the unbidden tears, and with a quiver in his kind voice the major interposed:

"Let her stay awhile: it will be better for both. Don't put him in the prison-room, Graham. Keep them by themselves for a while. We will come for her by and by." And then, before them all, he held forth his hand and gave Clancy's a cordial grasp:

"Cheer up, man. You've taken the right step at last. You are a free man to-day, even if you are a prisoner for the time being. Better this a thousand times than what you were."

Hayne, too, spoke a few kind words in a low tone, and gave the old soldier his hand at parting. Then the guard closed the door, and father and daughter were left alone. As the groups around the guard-house began to break up and move away, and the officers, re-entering the carriages, drove over to head-quarters, a rollicking Irishman called to the sergeant of the guard,—

"Does he know the ould woman's skipped, sargent? Shure you'd better tell him. 'Twill cheer him, like."

But when, a few moments after, the news was imparted to Clancy, the effect was electric and startling. With one bound and a savage cry he sprang to the door. The sergeant threw himself upon him and strove to hold him back, but was no match for the frenzied man. Deaf to Kate's entreaties and the sergeant's commands, he hurled him aside, leaped through the door-way, shot like a deer past the lolling guardsmen on the porch, and, turning sharply, went at the top of his speed down the hill towards Sudsville before man could lay hand on him. The sentry on Number One cocked his rifle and looked inquiringly at the officer of the guard, who came running out. With a wild shriek little Kate threw herself upon the sentry, clasping his knees and imploring him not to shoot. The lieutenant and the sergeant both shouted, "Never mind! Don't fire!" and with others of the guard rushed in pursuit. But, old and feeble as he was, poor Clancy kept the lead, never swerving, never flagging, until he reached the door-way of his abandoned cot; this he burst in, threw himself upon his knees by the

bedside, and dragged to light a little wooden chest that stood by an open trap in the floor. One look sufficed: the mere fact that the trap was open and the box exposed was enough. With a wild cry of rage, despair, and baffled hatred, he clinched his hands above his head, rose to his full height, and with a curse upon his white lips, with glaring eyes and gasping breath, turned upon his pursuers as they came running in, and hurled his fists at the foremost. "Let me follow her, I say! She's gone with it all,—his money! Let me go!" he shrieked; and then his eyes turned stony, a gasp, a clutch at his throat, and, plunging headlong, he fell upon his face at their feet.

Poor little Kate! The old man was, indeed, free at last.

XVIII.

There had been a scene of somewhat dramatic nature at the colonel's office but a short time before, and one that had fewer witnesses. Agitated, nervous, and eventually astonished as Captain Rayner had been when the colonel had revealed to him the nature of Clancy's confession, he was far more excited and tremulous when he returned a second time. The commanding officer had been sitting deep in thought. It was but natural that a man should show great emotion on learning that the evidence he had given, which had condemned a brother officer to years of solitary punishment, was now disproved. It was to be expected that Rayner should be tremulous and excited. He had been looking worse and worse for a long time past; and now that it was established that he must have been mistaken in what he thought he saw and heard at Battle Butte, it was to be expected that he should show the utmost consternation and an immediate desire to make amends. He *had* shown great emotion; he was white and rigid as the colonel told him Clancy had made a full confession; but the expression on his face when informed that the man had admitted that he and Sergeant Gower were the only ones guilty of the crime—that Clancy and Gower divided the guilt as they had the money—was a puzzle to the colonel. Captain Rayner seemed daft: it was a look of wild relief, half unbelief, half delight, that shot across his haggard features. It was evident that *he had not heard at all what he expected.* This was what puzzled the colonel. He had been pondering over it ever since the captain's hurried departure "to tell his wife."

"We—we had expected—made all preparations to take this afternoon's train for the East," he stammered. "We are all torn up, all ready to start, and the ladies ought to go; but I cannot feel like going in the face of this."

"There is no reason why you should not go, captain. I am told Mrs. Rayner should leave at once. If need be, you can return from Chicago. Everything will be attended to properly. Of course you will know what to do towards Mr. Hayne. Indeed, I think it might be best for you to go."

But Rayner seemed hardly listening; and the colonel was not a man to throw his words away.

"You might see Mrs. Rayner at once, and return by and by," he

said; and Rayner gladly escaped, and went home with the wonderful news he had to tell his wife.

And now a second time he was back, and was urging upon the commanding officer the necessity of telegraphing and capturing Mrs. Clancy. In plain words he told the colonel he believed that she had escaped with the greater part of the money. The colonel smiled:

"That was attended to early this morning, captain. Hayne and the major asked that she be secured, and the moment we found her fled it confirmed their suspicions, and Billings sent despatches in every direction. She can't get away! She was his temptress, and I mean to make her share all the punishment."

"Colonel," exclaimed Rayner, while beads of sweat stood out on his forehead, "she is worse,—a thousand times worse! The woman is a fiend. She is the devil in petticoats—and ingenuity. My God! sir, I have been in torment for weeks past,—my poor wife and I. I have been criminally, cowardly weak; but I did not know what to do, —where to turn,—how to take it,—how to meet it. Let me tell you." And now great tears were standing in his eyes and beginning to trickle down his cheeks. He dashed them away. His lips were quivering, and he strode nervously up and down the matted floor. "When you refused to let Clancy re-enlist in the —th, two years after Battle Butte, he came to me and told me a story. He, too, had declared, as I did, that he had seen the money-packages in Hayne's hands; and he said the real reason he was kicked out of the —th was because the officers and men took sides with Hayne and thought he had sworn his reputation away. He begged me not to 'go back on him' as his own regiment had, and I thought he was being persecuted because he told the truth. God knows I fully believed Hayne guilty for more than three years,—it is only within the last year or so I began to have doubts; and so I took Clancy into B Company and soon made Mrs. Clancy a laundress. But she made trouble for us all, and there was something uncanny about them. She kept throwing out mysterious hints I could not understand when rumors of them reached me; and at last came the fire that burned them out, and then the stories of what Clancy had said in his delirium; and then she came to my wife and told her a yarn that—she swore to its truth, and nearly drove Mrs. Rayner wild with anxiety. She swore that when Clancy got to drinking he imagined he had seen *me* take that money from Captain Hull's saddle-bags and replace the sealed package: she said he was ready to swear that he and Gower—the deserter—and two of our men, honorably discharged now and living on ranches down in Nebraska, could all swear—would all swear—to the same thing,—that I was the thief. 'Sure you know it couldn't be so, ma'am; and yet he wants to go and tell Mr. Hayne,' she would say: 'there's the four of 'em would swear to it, though Gower's evidence would be no good; but the two men could hurt the captain.' Her ingenuity was devilish; for one of the men I had severely punished once in the Black Hills, and both hated me and had sworn they would get even with me yet. God help me, colonel! seeing every day the growing conviction that Hayne was innocent, that somebody else *must* be guilty, I thought, what if this

man *should*, in drunken gratitude to Hayne for saving his life, go to him and tell him this story, then back it up before the officials and call in these two others? I was weak, but it appalled me. I determined to get him out of the way of such a possibility. I got his discharge, and meantime strove to prevent his drinking or going near Hayne. *She* knew the real story he *would* tell. This was her devilish plan to keep me on watch against him. I never dreamed the real truth. She swore to me that three hundred dollars was all the money they had. I believed that when he confessed it would be what she declared. I never dreamed that Clancy and his confederate were the thieves: I never believed the money was taken until after Hayne received it. I saw how Hayne's guilt was believed in even in the face of contradictory evidence before the court. What would be the tendency if three men together were to swear against me, now that everybody thought him wronged? I know very well what you will think of my cowardice. I know you and your officers will say I should have given him every chance,—should have courted investigation; and I meant to do so, but first I wanted to hear from those discharged men in Nebraska. The whole scheme would have been exploded two months ago had I not been a coward; but night after night something kept whispering to me, 'You have wrecked and ruined a friendless young soldier's life. You shall be brought as low.'"

The colonel was, as he afterwards remarked, hardly equal to the occasion. He had as much contempt for moral weakness in a soldier as he had for physical cowardice; but Rayner's almost abject recital of his months of misery really left him nothing to say. Had the captain sought to defend or justify any detail of his conduct, he would have pounced on him like a panther. Twice the adjutant, sitting an absorbed and silent listener, thought the chief on the verge of an outbreak; but it never came. For some minutes after Rayner ceased the colonel sat steadily regarding him. At last he spoke:

"You have been so frank in your statement, captain, that I feel you fully appreciate how such deplorable weakness must be regarded in an officer. It is unnecessary for me to speak of that. The full particulars of Clancy's confession are not yet with me. Major Waldron has it all in writing, and Mr. Billings has merely told me the general features. Of course you shall have a copy of it in good time. As you go East to-day and have your wife and household to think for, it may be as well that you do not attempt to see Mr. Hayne before starting. And this matter will not be discussed."

And so it happened that when the Rayners drove to the station that bright afternoon, and a throng of ladies and officers gathered to see them off, some of the youngsters going with them into town to await the coming of the train, Nellie Travers had been surrounded by chattering friends of both sexes, constantly occupied, and yet constantly looking for the face of one who came not. For an hour before their departure every tongue in garrison that wagged at all—and few there were that wagged not—was discoursing on the exciting events of the morning,—Hayne's emancipation from the last vestige of suspicion, Clancy's capture, confession, and tragic death, Mrs. Clancy's flight

and probable future. At Rayner's, people spoke of these things very guardedly, because every one saw that the captain was moved to the depths of his nature. He was solemnity itself, and Mrs. Rayner watched him with deep anxiety, fearful that he might be exposed to some thoughtless or malicious questioning. Her surveillance was needless, however: even Ross made no allusion to the events of the morning, though he communicated to his fellows in the subsequent confidences of the club-room that Midas looked as though he'd been pulled through a series of knot-holes. "Looks more's though he were going to his own funeral than on leave," he added.

As for Hayne, he had been closeted with the colonel and Major Waldron for some time after his return,—a conference that was broken in upon by the startling news of Clancy's death. Then he had joined his friend the doctor at the hospital, and was still there, striving to comfort little Kate, who could not be induced to leave her father's rapidly stiffening form, when Mrs. Waldron re-entered the room. Drawing the child to her side and folding her motherly arms about her, she looked up in Hayne's pale face:

"They are going in five minutes. Don't you mean to see her?"

"Not there,—not under his roof or in that crowd. I will go to the station."

"I must run over and say good-by in a moment,—when the carriage goes around. Shall—shall I say you will come?"

There was a light in his blue eyes she was just beginning to notice now as she studied his face. A smile flickered one instant about the corners of his mouth, and then he held out his hand:

"She knows by this time, Mrs. Waldron."

An hour later Mrs. Rayner was standing on the platform at the station, Ross and others of her satellites hanging about her; Captain Rayner was talking in subdued tones with one or two of the senior officers; Miss Travers, looking feverishly pretty, was chatting busily with Royce and Foster, though a close observer could have noted that her dark eyes often sought the westward prairie over which wound the road to the distant post. It was nearly train-time, and three or four horsemen could be seen at various distances, while, far out towards the fort, long skirmish-lines and fluttering guidons were sweeping over the slopes in mimic war-array.

"I have missed all this," she said, pointing to the scene; "and I do love it so that it seems hard to go just as all the real soldier life is beginning."

"Goodness knows you've had offers enough to keep you here," said Foster, with not the blithest laugh in the world. "Any girl who will go East and marry a 'cit' and leave six or seven penniless subs sighing behind her, I have my opinion of: she's eminently level-headed," he added, with rueful and unexpected candor.

"I have hopes of Miss Travers yet," boomed Royce, in his ponderous basso,—"not personal hopes, Foster; you needn't feel for your pistol,—but I believe that her heart is with the army, like the soldier's daughter she is." And, audacious as was the speech and deserving of instant rebuke, Mr. Royce was startled to see her reddening vividly.

He would have plunged into hasty apology, but Foster plucked his sleeve:

"Look who's coming, you galoot! She hasn't heard a word either of us has said."

And though Nellie Travers, noting the sudden silence, burst into an immediate and utterly irrelevant lament over the loss of the Maltese kitten,—which had not been seen all that day and was not to be found when they came away,—it was useless. The effort was gallant, but the flame in her cheeks betrayed her as, throwing his reins to the orderly who followed him, Mr. Hayne dismounted at the platform and came directly towards her. To Mrs. Rayner's unspeakable dismay, he walked up to the trio, bowed low over the little gloved hand that was extended in answer to the proffer of his own, and next she saw that Royce and Foster had, as though by tacit consent, fallen back, and, *coram publico*, Mr. Hayne was sole claimant of the regards of her baby sister. There was but one comfort in the situation: the train was in sight. Forgetful, reckless for the moment, of what was going on around her, she stood gazing at the pair. No woman could fail to read the story; no woman could see his face, his eyes, his whole attitude and expression, and not read therein that old, old story that grows sweeter with every century of its life. That he should be inspired with sudden, vehement love for her exquisite Nell was something she could readily understand; but what—what meant *her* downcast eyes, the flutter of color on her soft and rounded cheek, the shy uplifting of the fringed lids from time to time as though in response to eager question or appeal? Heavens! would that train *never* come? The whistle was sounding in the distance, but it would take ages to drag those heavy Pullmans up the grade from the bridge where they had yet to stop. She could almost have darted forward, seized her sister by the wrist, and whispered again the baleful reminder that of late had had no mention between them,—"Thou art another's;" but in her distress her weak blue eyes sought her husband's face. He saw it all, and shook his head. Then there was nothing to be done.

As the train came rumbling finally into the station, she saw him once more clasp her sister's hand; then, with one long look into the sweet face that was hidden from her jealous eyes, he raised his forage-cap and stepped quickly back to where his horse was held. Her husband hastened to her side:

"Kate, I must speak to him. I don't care how he may take it; I cannot go without it."

They all watched the tall captain as he strode across the platform. Every man in uniform seemed to know instinctively that Rayner at last was seeking to make open reparation for the bitter wrong he had done. One or two strove to begin a general chat and affect an interest in something else, for Mrs. Rayner's benefit, but she, with trembling lips, stood gazing after her husband and seemed to beg for silence. Then all abandoned other occupation, and every man stood still and watched them. Hayne had quickly swung into saddle, and had turned for one more look, when he saw his captain with ashen face striding towards him, and heard him call his name.

"By Jove!" muttered Ross, "what command that fellow has over himself!" for, scrupulously observant of military etiquette, Mr. Hayne on being addressed by his superior officer had instantly dismounted, and now stood silently facing him. Even at the distance, there were some who thought they could see his features twitching; but his blue eyes were calm and steady,—far clearer than they had been but a moment agone when gazing good-by into the sweet face they worshipped. None could hear what passed between them. The talk was very brief; but Ross almost gasped with amaze, other officers looked at one another in utter astonishment, and Mrs. Rayner fairly sobbed with excitement and emotion, when Mr. Hayne was seen to hold forth his hand, and Rayner, grasping it eagerly in both his own, shook it once, then strode hastily away towards the rear of the train. His eyes were filled with tears he could not repress and could not bear to show.

That evening, as the train wound steadily eastward into the shadows of the night, and they looked out in farewell upon the slopes they had last seen when a wintry gale swept fiercely over the frozen surface and the shallow ravines were streaked with snow, Kate Rayner, after a long talk with her husband, and abandoning her boy to the sole guardianship of his nurse, settled herself by Nellie's side, and Nellie knew that she either sought confidences or had them to impart. Something of the old, quizzical look was playing about the corner of her pretty mouth as her elder sister, with feminine indirectness, began her verbal skirmishing with the subject. It was some time before the question was reached which led to her real objective:

"Did he—did Mr. Hayne tell you much about Clancy?"

"Not much. There was no time."

"You had fully ten minutes, I'm sure. It seemed even longer."

"Four by the clock, Kate."

"Well, four, then. He must have had something of greater interest."

No answer. Cheeks reddening, though.

"Didn't he?"—persistently.

"I will tell you what he told me of Clancy, Kate. Mrs. Clancy had utterly deceived you as to what he had to tell, had she not?"

"Utterly." And now it was Mrs. Rayner's turn to color painfully.

"Mr. Hayne tells me that Clancy's confession really explained how Captain Rayner was mistaken. It was not so much the captain's fault, after all."

"So Mr. Hayne told him. You knew they—you saw Mr. Hayne offer him his hand, didn't you?"

"I did not see: I knew he would." More vivid color, and much hesitation now.

"*Knew* he would! Why, Nellie, what do you mean? He didn't tell you that he was to see Captain Rayner. He couldn't have known."

"But I knew, Kate; and I told him how the captain had suffered."

"But how could you know that he would shake hands with him?"

"He promised me."

The silence was unbroken for a moment. Nellie Travers could hear the beating of her own heart as she nestled closer to her sister and

stole a hand into hers. Mrs. Rayner was trying hard to be dutiful, stern, unbending, to keep *her* faith with the distant lover in the East, whether Nell was true or no; but she had been so humbled, so changed, so shaken, by the events of the past few weeks, that she felt all her old spirit of guardianship ebbing away. "Must I give you up, Nell? and must he, too?—Mr. Van Antwerp?"

"He has not answered my last letter, Kate. It is nearly a week since I have heard from him."

"What did you write, Nellie?"

"What I had done twice before,—that he ought to release me."

"And—is Clancy's the only confession you have heard to-day?"

"The only one." A pause: then, "I know what you mean, Kate; but he is not the man to—to offer his love to a girl he knows is pledged to another."

"But if you were free, Nellie? Tell me."

"I have no right to say, Kate; but"—and two big tears were welling up into her brave eyes, as she clasped her hands and stretched them yearningly before her—"shall I tell you what I think a girl would say if she were free and had won his love?"

"What, Nellie?"

"She would say, 'Ay.' No woman with a heart could leave a man who has borne so much and come through it all so bravely."

Poor Mrs. Rayner! Humbled and chastened as she was, what refuge had she but tears, and then—prayer?

XIX.

Within the week succeeding the departure of the Rayners and Miss Travers, Lieutenant Hayne's brother-in-law and his remarkably attractive sister were with him in garrison and helping him fit up the new quarters which the colonel had rather insisted on his moving into and occupying, even though two unmarried subalterns had to move out and make way for him. This they seemed rather delighted to do. There was a prevailing sentiment at Warrener that nothing was too good for Hayne nowadays; and he took all this adulation so quietly and modestly that there was difficulty in telling just how it affected him. Towards those who had known him well in the days of his early service he still maintained a dignity and reserve of manner that kept them at some distance. To others, especially to the youngsters in the —th as well as to those in the Riflers, he unbent entirely, and was frank, unaffected, and warm-hearted. He seemed to bask in the sunshine of the respect and consideration accorded him on every side. Yet no one could say he seemed happy. Courteous, grave far beyond his years, silent and thoughtful, he impressed them all as a man who had suffered too much ever again to be light-hearted. Then it was more than believed he had fallen deeply in love with Nellie Travers; and that explained the rarity and sadness of his smile. To the women he was a centre of intense and romantic interest. Mrs. Waldron was an object of jealousy because of the priority of her claims to his regard. Mrs. Hurley—the sweet sister who so strongly resembled him

—was the recipient of universal attention from both sexes. Hayne and the Hurleys, indeed, would have been invited to several places an evening could they have accepted. And yet, with it all, Mr. Hayne seemed at times greatly preoccupied. He had a great deal to think of.

To begin with, the widow Clancy had been captured in one of the mining towns, where she had sought refuge, and brought back by the civil authorities, nearly three thousand dollars in greenbacks having been found in her possession. She had fought like a fury and proved too much for the sheriff's posse when first arrested, and not until three days after her incarceration was the entire amount brought to light. There was no question what ought to be done with it. Clancy's confession established the fact that almost the entire amount was stolen from Captain Hull nearly six years before, the night previous to his tragic death at Battle Butte. Mrs. Clancy at first had furiously declared it all a lie; but Waldron's and Billings's precaution in having Clancy's entire story taken down by a notary public and sworn to before him eventually broke her down. She made her miserable, whining admissions to the sheriff's officers in town,—the colonel would not have her on the post even as a prisoner,—and there she was still held, awaiting further disclosures, while little Kate was lovingly cared for at Mrs. Waldron's. Poor old Clancy was buried and on the way to be forgotten.

What proved the hardest problem for the garrison to solve was the fact that, while Mr. Hayne kept several of his old associates at a distance, he had openly offered his hand to Rayner. This was something the Riflers could not account for. The intensity of his feeling at the time of the court-martial none could forget: the vehemence of his denunciation of the captain was still fresh in the memory of those who heard it. Then there were all those years in which Rayner had continued to crowd him to the wall; and finally there was the almost tragic episode of Buxton's midnight visitation, in which Rayner, willingly or not, had been in attendance. Was it not odd that in the face of all these considerations the first man to whom Mr. Hayne should have offered his hand was Captain Rayner? Odd indeed! But then only one or two were made acquainted with the full particulars of Clancy's confession, and none had heard Nellie Travers's request. Touched as he was by the sight of Rayner's haggard and trouble-worn face, relieved as he was by Clancy's revelation of the web that had been woven to cover the tracks of the thieves and ensnare the feet of the pursuers, Hayne could not have found it possible to offer his hand; but when he bent over the tiny glove and looked into her soft and brimming eyes at the moment of their parting he could not say no to the one thing she asked of him: it was that if Rayner came to say, "Forgive me," before they left, he would not repel him.

There was one man in garrison whom Hayne cut entirely, and for whom no one felt the faintest sympathy; and that, of course, was Buxton. With Rayner gone, he hardly had an associate, though the *esprit de corps* of the —th prompted the cavalry officers to be civil to him when he appeared at the billiard-room. As Mr. Hurley was fond of the game, an element of awkwardness was manifest the first time

the young officers appeared with their engineer friend. Hayne had not set foot in such a place for five years, and quietly declined all invitations to take a cue again. It was remembered of him that he played the prettiest game of French caroms of all the officers at the station when he joined the Riflers as a boy. Hurley could only stay a very short time, and the subalterns were doing their best to make it lively for him. Some, indeed, showed strong inclination to devote themselves to Mrs. Hurley; but she was too busy with her brother's household affairs to detect their projects. Hurley had turned very red and glared at Buxton the first time the two met at the club-room, but the bulky captain speedily found cover under which to retire, and never again showed himself in general society until the engineer with the scientific attainments as a boxer as well as road-builder was safely out of the post.

And yet there came a day very soon when Mr. Hayne wished that he could go to Buxton's quarters. He had in no wise changed his opinion of the man himself, but the Rayners had not been gone a fortnight before Mrs. Buxton began to tell the ladies of the charming letters she was receiving from Mrs. Rayner,—all about their travels. There were many things he longed to know, yet could not ask.

There came to him a long and sorrowful letter from the captain himself, but, beyond a few matters relating to the company and the transfer of its property, it was all given up to a recapitulation of the troubles of the past few years and to renewed expressions of his deep regret. Of the ladies he made but casual mention. They were journeying down the Mississippi on one of its big steamers when he wrote, and Mrs. Rayner was able to enjoy the novelties of the trip, and was getting better, but still required careful nursing. Miss Travers was devoted to her. They would go to New Orleans, then possibly by sea around to New York, arriving there about the 5th of June: that, however, was undecided. He closed by asking Hayne to remind Major Waldron that his copy of Clancy's confession had not yet reached him, and he was anxious to see it in full.

"The one thing lacking to complete the chain is Gower," said the major, as he looked up over his spectacles. "It would be difficult to tell what became of him. We get tidings of most of the deserters who were as prominent among the men as he appears to have been; but I have made inquiry, and so has the colonel, and not a word has ever been heard of him since the night he appeared before Mrs. Clancy and handed over the money to her. He was a strange character, from all accounts, and must have had some conscience, after all. Do you remember him at all, Hayne?"

"I remember him well. We made the march from the Big Horn over to Battle Butte together, and he was a soldier one could not help remarking. Of course I never had anything to say to him; but we heard he was an expert gambler when the troop was over there at Miners' Delight."

"Of course his testimony isn't necessary. Clancy and his wife between them have cleared you, after burying you alive five years. But nothing but his story could explain his singular conduct,—planning the

whole robbery, executing it with all the skill of a professional jail-bird, deserting and covering several hundred miles with his plunder, then daring to go to the old fort, find Mrs. Clancy, and surrender every cent, the moment he heard of your trial. What a fiend that woman was! No wonder she drove Clancy to drink!"

"Will you send copies of her admission with Clancy's affidavits?" asked Hayne.

"Here they are in full," answered the major. "The colonel talks of having them printed and strewn broadcast as warnings against 'snap judgment' and too confident testimony in future."

Divested of the legal encumbrances with which such documents are usually weighted, Clancy's story ran substantially as follows:

"I was sergeant in K troop, and Gower was in F. We had been stationed together six months or so when ordered out on the Indian campaign that summer. I was dead-broke. All my money was gone, and my wife kept bothering me for more. I owed a lot of money around head-quarters, too, and Gower knew it, and sometimes asked me what I was going to do when we got back from the campaign. We were not good friends, him and I. There was money dealings between us, and then there was talk about Mrs. Clancy fancying him too much. The paymaster came up with a strong escort and paid off the boys late in October, just as the expedition was breaking up and going for home, and all the officers and men got four months' pay. There was Lieutenant Crane and twenty men of F troop out on a scout, but the lieutenant had left his pay-rolls with Captain Hull, and the men had all signed before they started, and so the captain he drew it all for them and put each man's money in an envelope marked with his name, and the lieutenant's too, and then crowded it all into some bigger envelopes. I was there where I could see it all, and Gower was watching him close. 'It's a big pile the captain's got,' says he. 'I'd like to be a road-agent and nab him.' When I told him it couldn't be over eleven hundred dollars, he says, 'That's only part. He has his own pay, and six hundred dollars company fund, and a wad of greenbacks he's been carryin' around all summer. It's nigh on to four thousand dollars he's got in his saddle-bags this day.'

"And that night, instead of Lieutenant Crane's coming back, he sent word he had found the trail of a big band of Indians, and the whole crowd went in pursuit. There was four companies of infantry, under Captain Rayner, and F and K troops,—what was left of them,—that were ordered to stay by the wagons and bring them safely down; and we started with them over towards Battle Butte, keeping south of the way the regiment had gone to follow Mr. Crane. And the very next day Captain Rayner got orders to bring his battalion to the river and get on the boat, while the wagons kept on down the bank with us to guard them. And Mr. Hayne was acting quartermaster, and he stayed with us; and him and Captain Hull was together a good deal. There was some trouble, we heard, because Captain Rayner thought another officer should have been made quartermaster and Mr. Hayne should have stayed with his company, and they had some words; but Captain Hull gave Mr. Hayne a horse and seemed to keep him with

him; and that night, in sight of Battle Butte, the steamboat was out of sight ahead when we went into camp, and I was sergeant of the guard and had my fire near the captain's tent, and twice in the evening Gower came to me and said now was the time to lay hands on the money and skip. At last he says to me, 'You are flat-broke, and they'll all be down on you when you get back to the post. No man in America wants five hundred dollars more than you do. I'll give you five hundred in one hour from now if you'll get the captain out of his tent for half an hour.' Almost everybody was asleep then; the captain was, and so was Mr. Hayne, and he went on to tell me how he could do it. He'd been watching the captain. It made such a big bundle, did the money, in all the separate envelopes that he had done it all up different,—made a memorandum of the amount due each man, and packed the greenbacks all together in one solid pile,—his own money, the lieutenant's, and the men's,—done it up in paper and tied it firmly and put big blotches of green sealing-wax on it and sealed them with the seal on his watch-chain. Says Gower, 'You get the captain out, as I tell you, and I'll slip right in, get the money, stuff some other paper with a few ones and twos in the package; his seal, his watch, and everything is there in the saddle-bags under his head, and I can reseal and replace it in five minutes, and he'll never suspect the loss until the command all gets together again next week. By that time I'll be three hundred miles away. Everybody will say 'twas Gower that robbed him, and you with your five hundred will never be suspected.' I asked him how could he expect the captain to go and leave so much money in his bags with no one to guard it; and he said he'd bet on it if I did it right. The captain had had no luck tracking Indians that summer, and the regiment was laughing at him. He knew they were scattering every which way now, and was eager to strike them. All I had to do was to creep in excited-like, wake him up sudden, and tell him I was sure I had heard an Indian drum and their scalp-dance song out beyond the pickets,—that they were over towards Battle Butte, and he could hear them if he would come out on the river-bank. 'He'd go quick,' says Gower, 'and think of nothing.'

"And—I wouldn't believe it, but he did. He sprang up and went right out with me, just flinging his overcoat round him; and he never seemed to want to come in. The wind was blowing soft-like from the southeast, and he stood there straining his ears trying to hear the sounds I told him of; but at last he gave it up, and we went back to camp, and he took his lantern and looked in his saddle-bags, and I shook for fear; but he seemed to find everything all right, and in the next ten minutes he was asleep, and Gower came and whispered to me, and I went with him, and he gave me five hundred dollars, in twenties. 'Now you're bound,' says he; 'keep the sentries off while I get my horse.' And that's the last I ever saw of him. Then a strange thing happened. 'Twas hardly daylight when a courier came galloping up, and I called the captain, and he read the despatch, and says he, 'By heaven, Clancy, you were right after all. There *are* Indians over there. Why didn't I trust your ears? Call up the whole command. The Riflers have treed them at Battle Butte, and Captain Rayner has gone with his battalion.

We are to escort the wagons to where the boat lies beyond the bend, and then push over with all the horsemen we can take.' It was after daylight when we got started, but we almost ran the wagons 'cross country to the boat, and there Captain Hull took F troop and what there was of his own, leaving only ten men back with the wagons; and not till then was Gower missed; but all were in such a hurry to get to the Indians that no one paid attention. Mr. Hayne he begged the captain to let him go too: so the train was left with the wagon-master and the captain of the boat, and away we went. You know all about the fight, and how 'twas Mr. Hayne the captain called to and gave his watch and the two packages of money when he was ordered to charge. I was right by his side; and I swore—God forgive me!—that through the crack and tear in the paper I could see the layers of greenbacks, when I knew 'twas only some ones and twos Gower had slipped in to make it look right; and Captain Rayner stood there and saw the packet, too, and Sergeant Walshe and Bugler White; but them two were killed with him: so that 'twas only Captain Rayner and I was left as witnesses, and never till we got to Laramie after the campaign did the trouble come. I never dreamed of anything ever coming of it but that every one would say Gower stole the money and deserted; but when the captain turned the packages over to Mr. Hayne, and then got killed, and Mr. Hayne carried the packages, with the watch, seal, saddle-bags, and all, in to Cheyenne, and never opened them till he got there,—two weeks after, when we were all scattered,—then they turned on him, his own officers did, and said he stole it and gambled or sent it away in Cheyenne.

"I had lost much of my money then, and Mrs. Clancy got the rest, and it made me crazy to think of that poor young gentleman accused of it all; but I was in for it, and knew it meant prison for years for me, and perhaps they couldn't prove it on him. I got to drinking then, and told Captain Rayner that the —th was down on me for swearing away the young officer's character; and then he took me to Company B when the colonel wouldn't have me any more in the —th; and one night when Mrs. Clancy had been raising my hair and I wanted money to drink and she'd give me none, little Kate told me her mother had lots of money in a box, and that Sergeant Gower had come and given it to her while they were getting settled in the new post after the Battle Butte campaign, and he had made her promise to give it to me the moment I got back,—that somebody was in trouble, and that I must save him; and I believed Kate, and charged Mrs. Clancy with it, and she beat me and Kate, and swore it was all a lie; and I never could get the money. And at last came the fire; and it was the lieutenant that saved my life and Kate's, and brought back to her all that pile of money through the flames. It broke my heart then, and I vowed I'd go and tell him the truth; but they wouldn't let me. She told me the captain said he would kill me if I blabbed, and she would kill Kate. I didn't dare, until they told me my discharge had come; and then I was glad when the lieutenant and the major caught me in town. When they promised to take care of little Kate I didn't care what happened to me. The money Mrs. Clancy has—except perhaps two hundred

dollars—all belongs to Lieutenant Hayne, since he paid off every cent that was stolen from Captain Hull."

Supplemented by Mrs. Clancy's rueful and incoherent admissions, Clancy's story did its work. Mrs. Clancy could not long persist in her various denials after her husband's confession was brought to her ears, and she was totally unable to account satisfactorily for the possession of so much money. Little Kate had been too young to grasp the full meaning of what Gower said to her mother in that hurried interview; but her reiterated statements that he came late at night, before the regiment got home, and knocked at the door until he waked them up, and her mother cried when he came in, he looked so different, and had spectacles, and a patch on his cheek, and ranch clothes, and he only stayed a little while, and told her mother he must go back to the mountains, the police were on his track,—she knew now he spoke of having deserted,—and he gave her mother lots of money, for she opened and counted it afterwards and told her it must all go to papa to get some one out of trouble,—all were so clear and circumstantial that at last the hardened woman began to break down and make reluctant admissions. When an astute sheriff's officer finally told her that he knew where he could lay hands on Sergeant Gower, she surrendered utterly. So long as he was out of the way,—could not be found,—she held out; but the prospect of dragging into prison with her the man who had spurned her in years gone by and was proof against her fascinations was too alluring. She told all she could at his expense. He had ridden eastward after his desertion, and, making his way down the Missouri, had stopped at Yankton and gone thence to Kansas City, spending much of his money. He had reached Denver with the rest, and there—she knew not how—had made or received more, when he heard of the fact that Captain Hull had turned over his property to Lieutenant Hayne just before he was killed, and that the lieutenant was now to be tried for failing to account for it. He brought her enough to cover all he had taken, but—here she lied—strove to persuade her to go to San Francisco with him. She promised to think of it if he would leave the money,—which he did, swearing he would come for her and it. That was why she dared not tell Mike when he got home. He was so jealous of her.

To this part of her statement Mrs. Clancy stoutly adhered; but the officers believed Kate.

One other thing she told. Kate had declared he wore a heavy patch on his right cheek and temple. Yes, Mrs. Clancy remembered it. Some scoundrels had sought to rob him in Denver. He had to fight for life and money both, and his share of the honors of the fray was a deep and clean cut extending across the cheek-bone and up above the right ear.

As these family revelations were told throughout the garrison and comment of every kind was made thereon, there is reason for the belief that Mrs. Buxton found no difficulty in filling her letters with particulars of deep interest to her readers, who by this time had carried out the programme indicated by Captain Rayner. Mid-June had come; the ladies, apparently benefited by the sea-voyage, had landed in New

York and were speedily driven to their old quarters at the Westminster; and while the captain went to head-quarters of the department to report his arrival on leave and get his letters, a card was sent up to Miss Travers which she read with cheeks that slightly paled:

"He is here, Kate."

"Nellie, you—you won't throw him over, after all he has done and borne for you?"

"I shall keep my promise," was the answer.

XX.

"And so she's really going to marry Mr. Van Antwerp," said Mrs. Buxton to Mrs. Waldron a few days later in the month of sunshine and roses.

"I did not think it possible when she left," was the reply. "Why do you say so now?"

"Oh, Mrs. Rayner writes that the captain had to go to Washington on some important family matters, and that she and Nellie were at the sea-shore again, and Mr. Van Antwerp was with them from morning till night. He looked so worn and haggard, she said, that Nellie could not but take pity on him. Heavens! think of having five hundred thousand dollars sighing its life away for you!—especially when he's handsome. Mrs. Rayner made me promise to send it right back, because he would never give her one before, but she sent his picture. It's splendid. Wait, and I'll show you." And Mrs. Buxton darted into the house.

When she reappeared, three or four young cavalrymen were at the gate, chatting with Mrs. Waldron, and the picture was passed from hand to hand, exciting varied comment. It was a simple *carte de visite*, of the style once spoken of as vignette,—only the head and shoulders being visible,—but it was the picture of a strong, clear-cut face, with thick, wavy black hair just tingeing with gray, a drooping moustache, and long English whiskers. The eyes were heavy-browed, and, though partially shaded by the gold-rimmed *pince-nez*, were piercing and fine. Mr. Van Antwerp was unquestionably a fine-looking man.

"Here comes Hayne," said Royce. "Show it to him. He likes pictures; though I wouldn't like this one if I were in his place."

Mr. Hayne stopped in some surprise when hailed, greeted Mrs. Waldron warmly, and bowed courteously to Mrs. Buxton, who was watching him narrowly.

"Want to see a picture of the man you ought to go and perforate?" asked Webster, with that lofty indifference which youngsters have to the ravages of the tender passion on subjects other than themselves.

"To whom do you refer?" asked Hayne, smiling gravely, and little imagining what was in store for him.

"This," said Webster, holding out the card. Hayne took it, gave one glance, started, seized it with both hands, studied it eagerly, while his own face rapidly paled, then looked up with quick, searching eyes.

"Who is this?" he asked.

"The man who's engaged to Miss Travers,—Mr. Van Antwerp."

"This—*this*—Mr. Van Antwerp!" exclaimed Hayne, his face white as a sheet. "Here, take it, Royce!" And in an instant he had turned and gone.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I knew he was *that* hard hit," drawled Webster. "Did you, Royce?"

But Royce did not answer.

A gorgeous moonlight is bathing the Jersey coast in sparkling silver. The tumbling billows come thundering in to the shining strand, and sending their hissing, seething, whirling waters, all shimmer and radiance, to the very feet of the groups of spectators. There are hundreds of people scattered here and there along the shingle, and among the groups a pale-faced young man in tweed travelling-suit has made his way to a point where he can command a view of all the passers-by. It is nearly eleven o'clock before they begin to break up and seek the broad corridors of the brilliantly-lighted hotel. A great military band of nearly forty pieces is playing superbly at intervals, and every now and then, as some stirring martial strains come thrilling through the air, a young girl in a group near at hand beats time with her pretty foot and seems to quiver with the influence of the soldier melodies. A tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired man bends devotedly over her, but he, too, seems to rise to his full height at times, and there is something in the carriage and mien that tells that soldier songs have thrilled his veins ere now. And this man the young traveller in gray watches as though his eyes were fascinated. Standing in the shade of a little summer-house, he never ceases his scrutiny of the group.

At last the musicians go, and the people follow. The sands are soon deserted; the great piazzas are emptied of their promenaders; the halls and corridors are still patronized by the few belated chaperons and their giddy charges. The music-loving girl has gone aloft to her room, and her aunt, the third member of the group that so chained the attention of the young man in gray, lingers for a moment to exchange a few words with their cavalier. He seems in need of consolation.

"Don't be so down-hearted, Mr. Van Antwerp. It is very early in the summer, and you have the whole season before you."

"No, Mrs. Rayner: it is very different from last year. I cannot explain it, but I know there has been a change. I feel as—as I used to in my old, wild days when a change of luck was coming. It's like the gambler's superstition; but I cannot shake it off. Something told me she was lost to me when you boarded that Pacific Express last February. I was a fool ever to have let her go."

"Is she still so determined?"

"I cannot shake her resolution. She says that at the end of the year's time originally agreed upon she will keep her promise; but she will listen to no earlier marriage. I have about given up all hope. Something again—that fearful something I cannot shake off—tells me that my only chance lay in getting her to go with me this month. Once abroad with her, I could make her happy; but——"

He breaks off irresolutely, looking about him in the strange, hunted manner she has noted once or twice already.

"You are all unstrung, Mr. Van Antwerp. Why not go to bed and try and sleep? You will be so much brighter to-morrow."

"I cannot sleep. But don't let me keep you. I'll go out and smoke a cigar. Good-night, Mrs. Rayner. Whatever comes of it all, I shall not forget your kindness."

So he turns away, and she still stands at the foot of the staircase, watching him uneasily. He has aged greatly in the past few months. She is shocked to see how gray, how fitful, nervous, irritable, he has become. As he moves towards the door-way, she notes how thin his cheek has grown, and wonders at the irresolution in his movements when he reaches the broad piazza. He stands there an instant, the massive door-way forming a frame for a picture *en silhouette*, his tall spare figure thrown black upon the silver sea beyond. He looks up and down the now-deserted galleries, fumbles in his pockets for his cigar-case, bites off with nervous clip the end of a huge "Regalia," strikes a light, and before the flame is half applied to his weed throws it away, then turns sharply and strides out of sight towards the office.

Another instant, and, as though in pursuit, a second figure, erect, soldierly, with quick and bounding step strides across the glittering moon-streak, and Mrs. Rayner's heart stands still.

Only for an instant, though. She has seen and recognized Lawrence Hayne. Concealed from them he is following Mr. Van Antwerp, and there can be but one purpose in his coming here,—Nellie. But what can he want with her—her rightful lover? She springs from the lower step on which she has been standing, runs across the tessellated floor, and stops short in the door-way, gazing after the two figures. She is startled to find them close at hand,—one, Van Antwerp, close to the railing, facing towards her, his features ghastly in the moonlight, his left hand resting, and supporting him, on one of the tall wooden pillars; the other, Hayne, with white clinching fists, advancing upon him. Above the low boom and roar of the surf she distinctly hears the clear tenor ring of his voice in the tone of command she last heard under the shadow of the Rockies, two thousand miles away:

"Halt!"

No wonder a gentleman in civil life looks amazed at so peremptory a summons from a total stranger. In his high indignation will he not strike the impertinent subaltern to earth? As a well-bred woman, it occurs to her that she ought to rush out and avert hostilities by introducing them, or something; but she has no time to act. The next words simply take her breath away:

"Sergeant Gower, I arrest you as a deserter and thief! You deserted from F troop, —th Cavalry, at Battle Butte!"

She sees the fearful gleam on the dark man's face; there is a sudden spring, a clinch, a straining to and fro of two forms,—one tall, black, snaky, the other light, lithe, agile, and trained; muttered curse, panting breath, and then, sure as fate, the taller man is being borne backward against the rail. She sees the dark arm suddenly relax its grasp of the gray form and disappear an instant. Then, there it comes again, and with it a gleam of steel. With one shriek of warning and terror she springs towards them,—just in time. Hayne glances up, catches the

lifted wrist, hurls his whole weight upon the tottering figure, and over goes the Knickerbocker prone upon the floor. Hayne turns one instant: "Go in-doors, Mrs. Rayner. This is no place for you. Leave him to me."

And in that instant, before either can prevent, Steven Van Antwerp, *alias* Gower, springs to his feet, leaps over the balcony rail, and disappears in the depths below. It is a descent of not more than ten feet to the sands beyond the dark passage that underlies the piazza, but he has gone down into the passage itself. When Mr. Hayne, running down the steps, gains his way to the space beneath the piazza, no trace of the fugitive can he find.

* * * * * * * * * *

Nor does Mr. Van Antwerp appear at breakfast on the following morning, nor again to any person known to this story. An officer of the —th Cavalry, spending a portion of the following winter in Paris, writes that he met him face to face one day in the galleries of the Louvre. Being in civilian costume, of course, and much changed in appearance since he was a youth in the straps of a second lieutenant, it was possible for him to take a good long look at the man he had not seen since he wore the chevrons of a dashing sergeant in the Battle Butte campaign. "He has grown almost white," wrote the lieutenant, "and I'm told he has abandoned his business in New York and never will return to the United States."

Rayner, too, has grown gray. A telegram from his wife summoned him to the sea-side from Washington the day after this strange adventure of hers. He found her somewhat prostrate, his sister-in-law very pale and quiet, and the clerks of the hotel unable to account for the disappearance of Mr. Van Antwerp. Lieutenant Hayne, they said, had told them he received news which compelled him to go back to New York at once; but the gentleman's traps were all in his room. Mr. Hayne, too, had gone to New York; and thither the captain followed. A letter came to him at the Westminster which he read and handed in silence to Hayne. It was as follows:

"By the time this reaches you I shall be beyond reach of the law and on my way to Europe to spend what may be left of my days. I hope they may be few; for the punishment that has fallen upon me is more than I can bear, though no more than I deserve. You have heard that my college days were wild, and that after repeated warnings my father drove me from home, sending me to Wyoming to embark in the cattle-business. I preferred gambling, and lost what he gave me. There was nothing then left but to enlist; and I joined the —th. Mother still believed me in or near Denver, and wrote regularly there. The life was horrible to me after the luxury and lack of restraint I had enjoyed, and I meant to desert. Chance threw in my way that temptation. I robbed poor Hull the night before he was killed, repacked the paper so that even the torn edges would show the greenbacks, resealed it,—all just as I have had to hear through her pure and sacred lips it was finally told and her lover saved.

"God knows I was shocked when I heard in Denver he was to be tried for the crime. I hastened to Cheyenne, not daring to show my-

self to him or any one, and restored every cent of the money, placing it in Mrs. Clancy's hands, as I dared not stay; but I had hoped to give it to Clancy, who had not arrived. The police knew me, and I *had* to go. I gave every cent I had, and *walked* back to Denver, then got word to mother of my fearful danger; and, though she never knew I was a deserter, she sent me money, and I came East and went abroad. Then my whole life changed. I was appalled to think how low I had fallen. I shunned companionship, studied, did well at Heidelberg; father forgave me, and died; but God has not forgiven, and at the moment when I thought my life redeemed this retribution overtakes me.

"If I may ask anything, it is that mother may never know the truth. I will tell her that Nellie could not love me, and I could not bear to stay."

Some few weeks later that summer Miss Travers stood by the same balcony rail, with an open letter in her hand. There was a soft flush on her pretty, peachy cheek, and a far-away look in her sweet blue eyes.

"What news from Warrener, Nellie?" asked Mrs. Rayner.

"Fluffy has reappeared."

"Indeed! Where?"

"At Mr. Hayne's. He writes that as he returned, the moment he entered the hall she came running up to him, arching her back and purring her delight and welcoming him just as though she belonged there now; and——"

"And what, Nellie?"

"He says he means to keep her until I come to claim her."

THE END.

CADET LIFE AT WEST POINT.

By Captain Charles King,
U. S. A.

New York:
Harper Brothers.

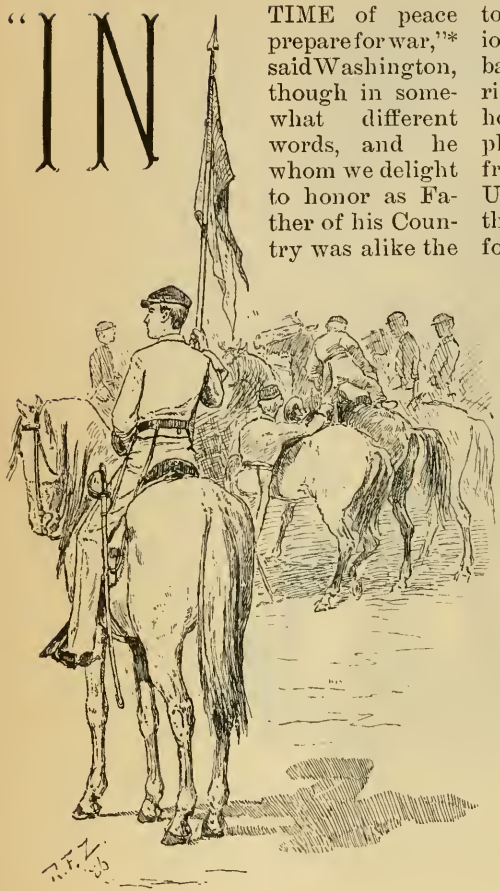
"I SHALL BE DEAD, I FEAR."

One throws milk on my clothes;
T'other plays with my nose:
What wanting signs are those!
Phillada flouts me.

I cannot work nor sleep
At all in season,
Love wounds my heart so deep,
Without all reason.
I 'gin to pine away
In my love's shadow,
Like as a fat beast may
Penned in a meadow.
I shall be dead, I fear,
Within this thousand year:
And all for that my dear
Phillada flouts me.

CADET LIFE AT WEST POINT.

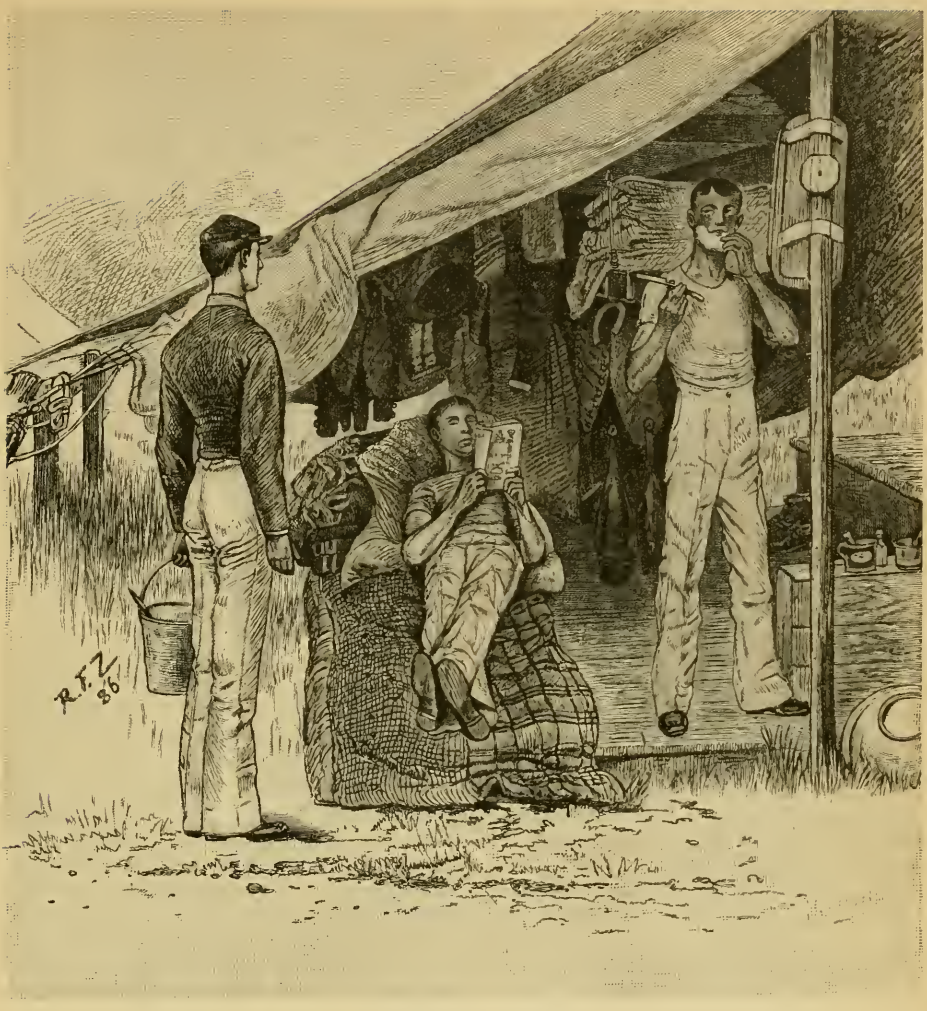
BY CHARLES KING, U.S.A.



"IN TIME of peace prepare for war,"* said Washington, though in somewhat different words, and he whom we delight to honor as Father of his Country was alike the father, if not the founder, of the nation's Military Academy at West Point. Possibly in those very days when he rested under Arnold's roof-tree in the rock-bound fortress of the Hudson Highlands he noted the strange topography that seemed to fit the spot for the great purpose to which it has been devoted. Certain it is that our traditions tell us George Washington declared it the very place for the soldier school of the United States, and here, early in the century, the Corps of Engineers laid its corner-stone, and became the foster-parents of the infant academy.

Its history and its purpose are known to nearly all. Yale and Harvard, its seniors by another century and more, are barely mentioned in some States and Territories where West Point is as a household word. It is emphatically the people's school, for its pupils are summoned from every Congressional district in the Union. It is democratic to an extent that no other school can hope to attain, for here, as nowhere else, the rank, riches, and prominence of parents avail as nothing, and every man stands on his own merits. Two-thirds of those appointed find no place on the final class list, and the son of a President has been distanced in the race the son of a bricklayer won. It is the people's school because it is open to all, rich or poor, black or white, Romanist, Protestant, or Mormon. The nation demands of its aspirant only that he shall be perfect in physique, of good moral character, and well grounded in the studies of the public schools, that he may be fitted for a training which in rigor and exaction has no parallel in America. Fifty years ago—before we had such public schools—the standard of admission was necessarily low, and three-fourths of those who easily passed the entrance examination proved subsequently unable to grapple with the problems of the four years' course. Thousands of dollars were wasted in feeding, clothing, and turning away scores of incompetents. Wisely the authorities decreed a higher standard of admission as the facilities for meeting it were spread throughout the land. Disappointed parents and offended Congressmen made loud denunciation of the change, and declared the new standard one that Grant, Sherman, Sheridan, and soldiers like them could never have passed, forgetful of the fact that times too had utterly changed, and that men of the mettle of those very three, were they boys again and had the opportunities of the boys of to-day, would need no lowering of the bars. The public schools give all the standard calls for, and it was to keep step with the progress of the age that a far-sighted Academic Board decided on the change. West Point would have

* "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual ways of preserving peace."—*Washington's Address to Congress, January* 8, 1790.



FIRST CLASS MAGNATES.

fallen hopelessly behind had it maintained the gauge of '46.

Well known as are its name and purposes, West Point to nine-tenths of our people is in its inner life as a sealed book. At other institutions the young man pays some five hundred dollars yearly to be a student; at West Point the institution pays the scholar. Herein lies one secret of its discipline. Not only does the government lay before the fortunate holder of a cadetship an excellent education and a life position in a high and honorable profession, but it pays him for his efforts to win the final prize. The student knows none of the cares or privations, and few of the temptations, of a large proportion of his fellow-toilers at the hundred colleges that adorn our land. He is abundantly clothed, warmed, housed, fed—provided for in every way. He has no expenses that his income does not amply meet; he has little or nothing to distract his mind from his studies; he cannot envy the dress or style of his wealthy classmates, for the son of a Vanderbilt must wear, and has worn, the same garb that warms the back of the hod carrier's boy. Freely supplied with provision against every healthful need, fully taught every manly and graceful accomplishment, finely schooled in science and in soldier lore, carefully

nursed and cared for in the event of illness or injury, the nation's pupil is indeed a favored boy.

But lavish as is the nation in all the appointments of its famous school, there is no cent thrown away. For every dollar spent on the education of his future officers "Uncle Sam" demands—and has good right to demand—full recompense. In return for all these benefits the young cadet must bind himself to four years of submission to the avuncular will; to four years of hard study, of prescribed exercise, of close seclusion, of prompt and cheerful subordination to rigid discipline; to four years of a life every day and hour of which is planned for him beforehand; and he must willingly yield himself to the preconcerted moulding, or give place to one who can and will.

The casual visitor to the academy sees in cadet life only a vision of military exercises, of gallant, graceful forms, of faultless uniforms and glittering arms, of bewildering "hops" and "germans," of moonlight camps amid the grandest scenery on the continent, of romance and chivalry all athrob with the stirring strains of martial music; but he who knows it well knows it to be four years of rigorous preparation for a profession that is full of demands upon every energy of manhood. In years of association with the dear old Point—as boy visitor, as student youth, as graduate and instructor—the writer can recall hundreds of cases where the cadet bemoaned the fates that sent him into a life so full of monotonous routine and rigid discipline, and yet not one instance of a discharged cadet who did not sincerely regret his failure and banishment.

To succeed at West Point a young man must have good natural ability, and more than the average capacity for application. To be happy there, he must be heart, soul, and enthusiastically a soldier. Without a fervent love for the profession he adopts, there must come days and weeks when he will groan in weariness of spirit—so depressing does the wintry monotony become.

A glimpse at the brighter side is best to be had during the annual encampment, when from mid-June until the end of August the Corps of Cadets deserts the gray stone barracks, and pitches its white tents among the trees along the eastern edge of the broad plateau.

Three classes—Seniors, Sophomores, and Freshmen they would be termed in college—First, Third, and Fourth they are called at the Point—are here assembled for ten weeks of practical instruction in all manner of matters military. The Junior, or Second Class, after two years of unremitting duty, is away on the one almost delirious break in the four years' course—that one brief visit to home and fireside that is vouchsafed during the third summer of cadet life—the only visit so long as the cadet shall wear the gray.

In camp, as in barracks, the corps is organized as a battalion of four companies, with the full complement of officers and non-commissioned officers selected from their own ranks. It is a proud thing to be head of the class, and prospective possessor of a commission in the engineers, but even this dignity pales in cadet eyes in presence of those luminaries of the First Class—the adjutant and "first captain." Having served one year as a private in the Fourth Class, the cadet becomes eligible for appointment to the grade of corporal, and some twenty out of a hundred young soldiers are decorated with the coveted chevrons of gold-lace. Another year, and the same number become sergeants, the most soldierly and reliable among them being chosen by the Commandant of Cadets to be the first sergeants of the four companies and sergeant-major of the battalion—positions which require "grit" and determination quite as much as they do ability, for the "orderly sergeant," as he was called for a century, and still is called by veterans of the wars of Mexico and the rebellion, is the very soul of the company. One year more, and the Second Class men become First Class, and the most "military" and meritorious of their number step into the proudest offices of the whole course: the young soldiers who wear the plumes and chevrons of the adjutant and captains are probably envied as they will not again be for years. He may not realize it at the time, but a "First Class officer" ranks far higher in the little world at West Point than the same youth graduated and promoted (?) to the grade of junior subaltern at a frontier post.

A day in camp is best observed late in August. By this time all the corps are well shaken down into their positions. The new cadets, or "plebes," are all thoroughly uniformed, drilled, and in their places in the battalion, and everything is moving with the clock-like regularity that

is so characteristic of the academy. With the "furlough class" away, there are perhaps two hundred and twenty young soldiers tenting there close under the grass-grown parapets of old Fort Clinton, and their surroundings would inspire a heart of stone. The broad glistening Hudson, bursting its way through the gorge of the Appalachians from the north, comes sweeping down that magnificent "reach" from Newburgh, and under the rocky flanks of Breakneck, Bull Hill, and old Cro' Nest, swirls around the jagged point of Constitution Island, and then is shouldered completely out of its course by the bold, jutting promontory that springs out from the mountain and stems the sweeping tide. The river beats in vain upon its adamant, and, flung aside, turns abruptly eastward, feels its way around the stubborn bluff, and thence flows once more southward, "unvexed to the sea."

North and east the Point is hemmed in by the mighty river, west and south by the rock-ribbed Highlands. The plateau, little by little, has been levelled and graded, until to-day it is a broad, beautiful, grass-grown plain, bounded on the west by the cozy homes of the officers and professors, on the south by the stately barracks, the grim, old-fashioned "Academic," the Grecian chapel, and the domed turrets of the Library. Skirting the precipitous river-banks, a broad, graded road encloses the plateau on the north and east, and others, as level and carefully kept, border it on west and south, and nearly bisect it along the meridian. Covered with well-cropped turf, the western half of "the plain" is devoted to infantry drills; the batteries and the crunching hoofs of the horses are limited to the gravel of the eastern half. All around are the rocky heights, trimmed with pine and fir and cedar, with here and there a peep at the stony parapet of some old redoubt or battery thrown up in the days of the Revolution. The square-built hostelry, once and for years known as Roe's, stands perched at the northeast limit of the plain. Statues in bronze or marble gleam here and there amid the foliage, and tell of deeds of heroism and devotion on the part of the sons of the old academy. The tall white staff glistens against the dark background of the Highlands, and throws to the breeze, high over all, the brilliant colors of the Stars and Stripes; and on the easternmost verg of the broad plateau lies the camp ground, the summer home of the Corps of Cadets.

Laid out in mathematical regularity, with well-gravelled pathways, sentry posts, and "color line," and shaded by beautiful trees, the encampment, like everything else at West Point, is so exquisitely trim and neat as to have little resemblance to the "tented field" as seen in actual service on the frontier. The white tents gleam in accurate ranks that look as though they were pitched by aid of the "straight-edge" rule. Farthest to the west are the guard and visitors' tents; then comes an open space between them and the color line, along which the arms are stacked every bright day. It is in this space that the camp ceremonies—guard mounting, dress parade, and the weekly inspections—take place. Immediately behind the color line are the tents of the four companies, two inward-facing rows to each, with a broad alley, known as the "general parade," separating the right and left wings. The company streets run east and west perpendicularly to the color line, and the tents of the cadet officers are pitched looking west along the streets of their respective companies. Behind the rows of company officers' tents, and opposite the right and left of camp, are the larger domiciles of those cadet magnates the adjutant and quartermaster. Back still farther are the double tents of the four army officers who are the immediate commanders and instructors of the four companies; and behind them all, at the rear of camp, is the big "marquee" of the Commandant of Cadets. Dotted about the rear of camp are the little tents occupied by the drum boy "orderlies," the boot-blacks, varnishers, etc.; and around them all, day and night, paces the chain of sentries, which, posted in mid-June, is never removed until the simultaneous fall of every tent on the 28th of August.

One day is the counterpart of another as the end of camp draws nigh, and the visitor who would take a peep at the inner phases of cadet life must have a "friend at court," and be an early riser. Let us suppose that in your desire to have a nearer view of those slender striplings you have invoked the aid of some one of the officers on duty at the Point. He tells you to be prepared to "make a day of it," warns you to be called at 5 A.M., and is waiting for you on the hotel piazza when you appear. Muffled in your overcoats,

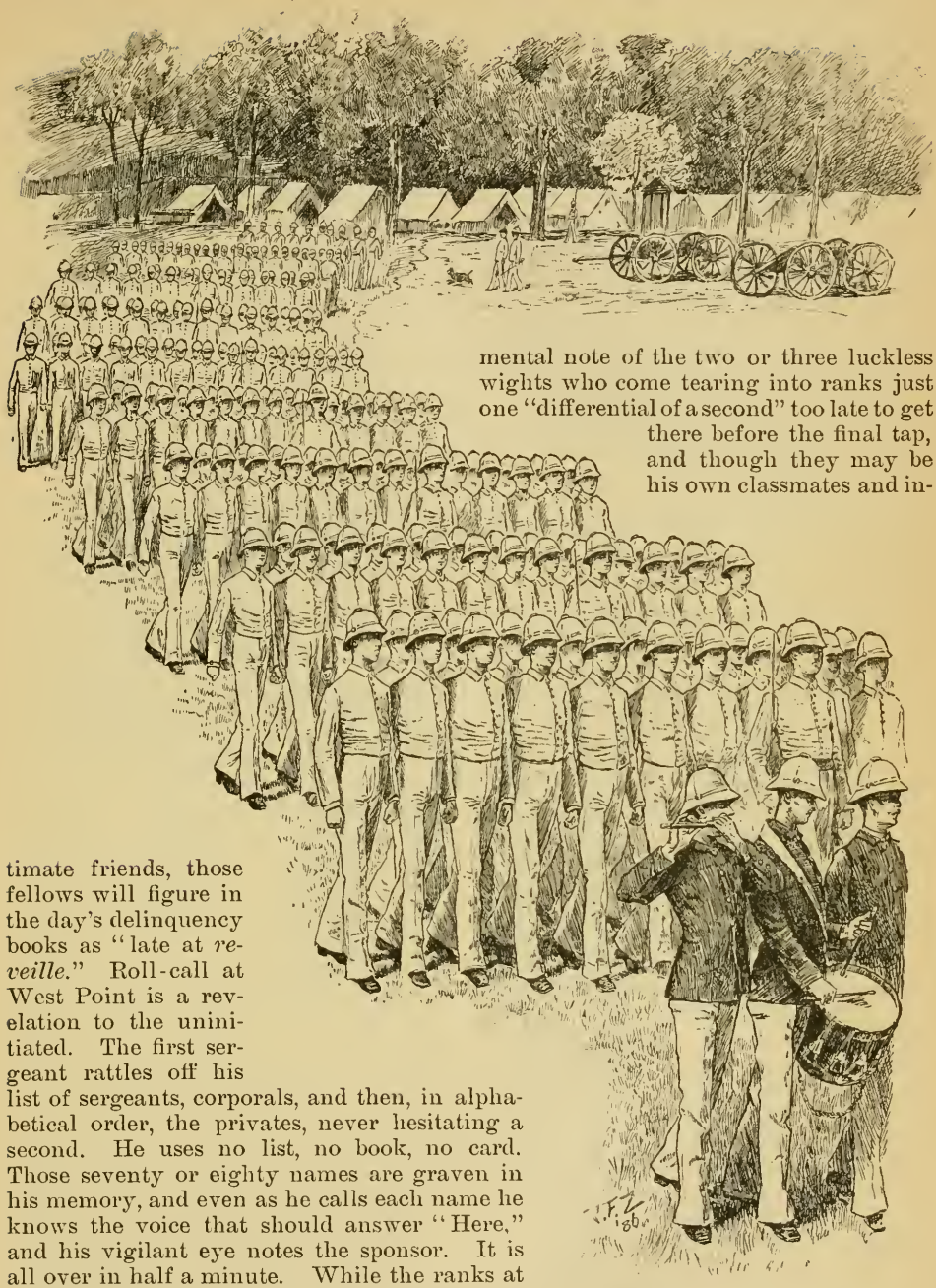
for these late August mornings are sharply cold, you walk briskly down the graded path leading to camp. A faint, drowsy gleam as of a lantern is visible at the guard tents, and the gas jets along the sentry posts have the sickly glare that early morning gives to all. Camp lies still as a grave, dim and ghostly, but all the eastern sky is lighting up with the radiance of coming morn, and the hoary battlements of "Old Fort Put," and the crags of Cro' Nest overhanging the sleeping Point, are alternately wreathed with wisps of cloud and roseate in reflection from the orient. Not a sound is heard as you near the sentry lines, but you may never hope to slip in unobserved. Keeping beyond hail of the guard tents, your conductor purposely leads you down by Fort Clinton's dark parapet, and you are close to the ghostly white village, when there is sudden gleam and rattle among the trees, a flash of steel, as a cadet rifle comes down to "charge bayonet," a stern young voice challenges, "Who comes there?" and before you stands a vigilant sentry, the dew dripping from the visor of his forage cap, the collar of his overcoat well muffled about his ears. "Friends with the countersign," is your conductor's prompt reply. "Halt, friends! advance one with the countersign," orders the sentinel, and at the uncompromising mandate, while you "stand fast," your friend steps up to that levelled bayonet, and over its threatening point whispers some cabalistic word that in the twinkling of an eye changes the whole attitude of the guard from one of fierce suspicion to respectful attention. "Advance, friends," he says, as his heels come together and his rifle to the "carry" with simultaneous click; and there he stands like a gray and white statue as you cross his guarded land, and penetrate without further hinderance the forbidden limits.

Sound sleepers are the boys, thanks to all their vigorous exercise, undoubted excellence of digestion, and presumable clearness of conscience. In ten minutes, by the inexorable rules of West Point, every mother's son in that camp must be up and doing, but among the tents not a soul as yet is stirring. In the gathering light you can see the sentries at the south and east slowly pacing their posts, and mark that the main guard is astir. A squad of little drummer boys is hastening across the plain toward camp; a corporal marches two silent youths in gray to the dew-dripping field-piece that stands at the northeast angle; the tips of the tents are gaining a rosy tint; the skies across the Hudson are gorgeous in their coloring; the mist is creeping from the stream that goes swirling down the silent reach; you hear a dull thud or two as the gunners ram home their cartridge, and the low-toned chatter of the drum boys as they brace their batter heads and look expectantly at the gilded hands of the big clock in the "Academic" tower across the plain. Suddenly there comes the mellow stroke of the bell, and with it a belching cloud of smoke and flame from the black muzzle of the gun, a thundering roar, and at the same instant the shrill music of the fifes and resonant rattle of the drums as they break into the stirring rolls of the *reveille*. It is enough to rouse the Seven Sleepers.

One after another tent flaps are raised, and still drowsy heads peer forth, and then by dozens, erect, slender, buttoned to the throat in their snug-fitting "coatees," and looking all legs in their trim white trousers, the young fellows swarm upon the company streets; but as yet all are "plebes"—the oldsters are in no such hurry to leave their warm blankets, and have learned the value of every military minute. The drums are playing their thundering march around camp; dozens of time-saving plebes, bucket-laden, are scurrying off in the direction of the water tanks, and come back ready for their *al fresco* ablutions. If there be any who, like Fitz-James and Roderick,

> "mutter their soldier matins by,"

we see nothing of it. Once more the drums have resumed the roll of the *reveille*, then suddenly cease. There comes a brief interval of silence, during which the company streets fill up with forms in gray and white. Then, sharp, quick, imperative, the "assembly," or "second call," is rattled on the drums. "Fall in!" order the sergeants, and like a flash each company springs into two long columns of files; for there is not an instant to lose. Every man must be in his place at the last tap of the inexorable drum—not twenty seconds from the first—and there it is. "Left face," orders each first sergeant at the instant, while his classmate and senior file-closer, the second sergeant, even as he answers to his own name, makes



MARCHING TO THE MESS-HALL.

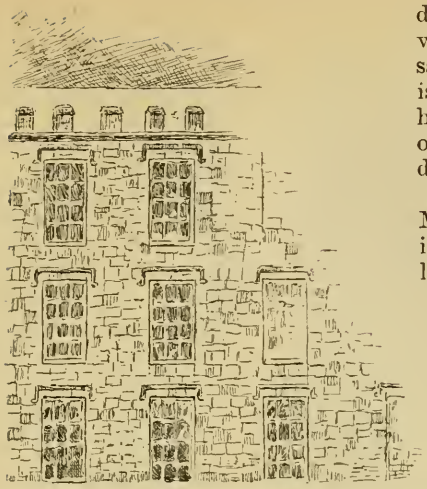
mental note of the two or three luckless wights who come tearing into ranks just one "differential of a second" too late to get there before the final tap, and though they may be his own classmates and intimate friends, those fellows will figure in the day's delinquency books as "late at *reveille*." Roll-call at West Point is a revelation to the uninitiated. The first sergeant rattles off his list of sergeants, corporals, and then, in alphabetical order, the privates, never hesitating a second. He uses no list, no book, no card. Those seventy or eighty names are graven in his memory, and even as he calls each name he knows the voice that should answer "Here," and his vigilant eye notes the sponsor. It is all over in half a minute. While the ranks at his single word scatter like sheep, he makes his brief soldierly report to the grave young captain, who stands near the flank, and the first duty of the day is over. The captains report to the adjutant or the officer of the day, as may be the custom at the time. Absentees, if any, are promptly hunted up. Off come the gray coats as bedding is piled, tent floors are swept, and tent walls raised for ventilation, and in another half-hour the drums are merrily rattling away on the old army tune "Pease upon a Trencher"—

the soldier signal for breakfast. Again the ranks are formed, rolls are called, the sergeants march their companies to the color line, the officers take their stations, the ringing voice of the "first captain" —the senior cadet officer—orders attention, swings the battalion into column of platoons to the left, then "Forward—guide right—march!" and to the stirring, old-fashioned music of the fifes and drums away they go across the broad level of the cavalry plain until they reach the main road; down the shaded lane between the chapel and the massive façade of the ugly old "Academic"; down past the beautiful pile of the new "Head-quarters" and the grassy terrace beyond, and then each platoon wheels in succession to the right, springily mounts the broad stone steps, and is swallowed up in the massive portals of the Mess-hall.

Just so for years, with the same buoyant, elastic tread, in the same solid ranks, have the nation's pupils marched to their daily bread. Faces that grew bronzed and bearded and lined with thought and care were bright and smooth-shaven and full of pluck and hope under the little blue forage caps, and forms that grew massive and stalwart, or feeble and shattered with honorable wounds, were all once clad in the tight-fitting uniform "coatee." Grant, silent, patient, and invincible; Sherman, brilliant, nervous, and quick; Sheridan, fiery, meteoric, burning with fight and energy; Lee, skilful and chivalric; Jackson, daring to the verge of recklessness, prayerful to the verge of fanaticism; Hancock, knightly and superb on every field; Thomas, leonine, steadfast, and indomitable; Meade, loyal, dutiful, and resolute; McPherson, Sedgwick, and Reynolds, magnificent even in death; Stuart, cavalier trooper and bold rider; Longstreet, grim war-dog of the Confederacy; Sidney Johnston and Charles F. Smith, twin types of soldierly grace and grandeur; dark-eyed, dapper Beauregard; saturnine Halleck; priestly Polk; scientific and staff-schooled McClellan; "Joe" Johnston, Sherman's last armed antagonist; Hood and Hardee, Hill, Ewell, Ramseur, Rosser, Armistead, Garnett, Kemper, Pickett, Sumner, Franklin, Porter, Heintzelman, Burnside, Hooker, Buford, Bayard, Howard, Rosecrans, Schofield, Stanley, Warren, Gibbon, Ord, Hunt, Getty, Humphreys—a host of names famous in the annals of the great war and distinguished in the history of the nation—all in their time, to the same old tunes of the fife and drum, marched at the command of the cadet first captain, thrice each day, to take their soldier rations at the Mess-hall.

True, the Mess-hall itself is a far handsomer building, as to exterior and interior, than the original affair to which our greatest soldiers were marched, and even in the last ten years great changes have been made in the domestic economies of the cadet. Time was when both table fare and service were far inferior to what they are to-day, and far shabbier than they should have been at the time; but now the Mess-hall challenges inspection. Vigilant officers have taken it in hand and made it a model. Few institutions can show a better refectory; none can exhibit better appetites.

Cheerful conversation promotes good digestion, say the doctors, and the clatter of tongues as the boys settle to their work exceeds the racket of knife and fork on the responsive crockery. There is a Babel of voices, an odd intermingling of dialects; for every section of our broad Union is there represented, and no cliques are encouraged. South Carolina hobnobs with her old enemy Massachusetts; creole blood from Louisiana is warmed by coffee from the same urn that starts the sluggish veins of the Pennsylvania Dutchman; soft-voiced sons of Georgia and Kentucky elide their "r's" and swap merry *badinage* with a fellow whose backwoods whang proclaims the "Pike" from Missouri; a swarthy Californian rips out some half-Spanish, half-savage expletive in excited controversy with his New England *vis-à-vis*, whose wildest flight in the possibilities of blasphemy is "Gosh all hemlock!" and a youth whose clear blue eyes and the blondest hair and skin imaginable proclaim him a Norseman who hails from a Scandinavian district in Minnesota happens along at the instant, with the red sash of the "officer of the day" over his shoulder, and the gentleman from the Golden Gate puts a bridle on his tongue forthwith. The officer of the day is "on honor" to note in his report every violation of academic regulations, and profanity is one of them. Were the Californian his bosom friend, and dismissal the penalty of his offence, there could be no middle course. The word of honor of the cadet is the *ne plus ultra* of West Point ethics; there is no



WALKING AN EXTRA.

going behind or beyond it. It is the first lesson taught the youngster on joining. It is preached in wordless sermons every day and hour of his four years' course. It is the last thing of his education he is apt to forget. Like other boys, he has his fun, his faults, his vices, and his "scrapes." He may violate every one of the few hundred regulations that have been evolved from year to year; he may "cut" church, "run it" to the Falls or other unhallowed resort; he may even make a predatory incursion upon the orchards or vineyards below the Point; but even to save himself or his best friend from punishment he draws the line at one thing—he won't lie. When a cadet says he has or has not done this or that, you can endorse the statement.

And so, when the cadet lieutenant from Minnesota reports his classmate from California for "using profane language," the latter never thinks of questioning the report or of reproaching the reporter. It is a matter of duty and honor, and that is the end of it. California not only gets a formidable figure on the demerit books, but for many a weary Saturday afternoon he will have to confine himself to his room, or else "walk extra," equipped as a sentinel, up and down the area of barracks.

But breakfast is over, time is up; the first captain makes quick but searching inspection of each table to see that there has been no wastage; the army "officer in charge," who is required to breakfast, dine, and sup on the identical fare which is laid before the cadets, comes forth from the steward's room and goes on to inspect the kitchen. Each company in succession receives the order to rise, and out

OFFICER OF THE DAY.

into the air and sunshine, leaping down the steps, go the youngsters; quickly they spring into ranks, and suddenly every voice but one is stilled—the omnipotent first captain again—and by his command the platoons wheel northward, and once more to lively music the battalion marches briskly away. The sentry on No. 6 salutes as they cross his post; one instant they stand motionless after wheeling into line, and then, at the command, "Break ranks—march!" scatter like a great covey of quail all over camp.

Next comes morning drill, the most unpopular, because the most monotonous. For nearly an hour the battalion is exercised in the manual of arms, and though this drill is one which is taken up "by battalion" only a fortnight or so each year, it is of trifling interest to spectators, and a purely perfunctory matter with the corps. Years ago, when the veteran Scott was chief of our little army, and its manœuvres were of the ponderous Prussian school, the "manual," under such commandants as Major Worth and Charles F. Smith, was a miracle of precision and beauty, and the old-fashioned smooth-bore cadet muskets, with shining bands and barrels, were brought to the "present," "charge," or "order" with a simultaneous crash that could be heard across the Hudson, and every motion of hand or finger was clock-work. But with the adoption of the light-infantry tactics here came a change that few failed to see. Possibly more of the spirit of the tactics of Hardee and Upton has been adopted by the corps than those eminent authors ever intended; certain it is that when unhindered the battalion of cadets will slap through the manual of arms with an easy grace that is peculiar to itself, and with small attention, after the initiatory "squad drills," to the finer points of the tactics. The general effect is attractive and business-like, it is all so deft and quick, but the old precision of movement can no longer be claimed for it. The "manual" is a matter to which our crack regiments in the National Guard give great prominence and careful teaching; with the Corps of Cadets it is of minor importance, and only when some new Commandant happens in, or a "tactical officer" who is a stickler for points, is there any attempt to hammer

"TURN OUT THE GUARD!"

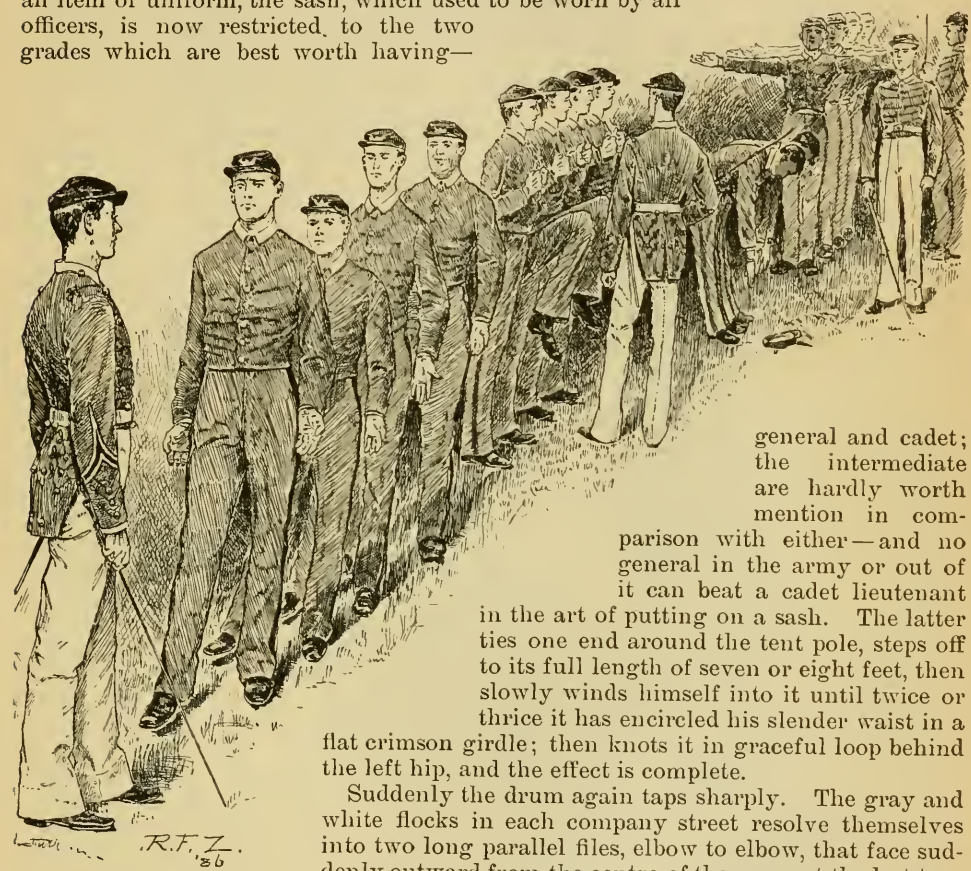
the battalion into mechanical accuracy again. There is a brief reaction, some sharp drilling "by the numbers" for a week or two; then the matter is gradually forgotten in the press of something more important, and the corps easily slips back into its own jaunty, *nonchalant* style, and keen-eyed citizen-soldiers who have run up from the armories of the Seventh or Twenty-second, in New York, note how this motion or the other is slighted, and wonder what it means. It simply means that at the Point and in the regular service the old Prussian precision is a thing of the past; officers, cadets, and soldiers have a dozen things of far greater importance to think of and attend to; celerity is the word; and yet—were it hinted to the battalion that the "manual" was to be overhauled this particular day on parade, the whole command would "brace up" and execute the entire programme in a way that would confound the critics.

Morning drill over, there is another scattering to tents. Busy "police" details from the lower classes put the company streets in perfect order; not a feather, a match, a wisp of straw, or scrap of paper is to be seen. All around and between the tents the details work, supervised by the vigilant eyes of some corporal, who well knows that should anything be amiss at inspection, no one but himself will be held responsible. Nominally the Third and Fourth classes are both represented on each "police detail," but if the bulk of the work be not done to this day by the "plebes," the system is radically changed from that of twenty-five years ago, when they did all of it.

Busy preparation is going on in each of the tents. Three, sometimes four, cadets are the occupants of each, and one of the inmates is "orderly." His business it is to see that the wooden tent floor is carefully swept, the blankets, pillows, and "comforters" accurately and squarely piled in the easternmost corner of the floor and farthest from the company street; spare shoes neatly polished and aligned at the back of the floor; all candles, candlesticks, cleaning materials, and miscellaneous items stowed away in the tin candle box which stands at the foot of the rear tent pole just behind the butts of the polished rifles; all belts, sabres, bayonet scabbards, and other equipments dusted, and hanging from their pegs on the rear tent pole; the jaunty dress hats perched on their appropriate shelf; all woollen clothing, overcoats, coatees, riding jackets, etc., neatly swung on a rack beneath the ridge-pole; all other clothing, including white trousers, belts, gloves, collars, and the like, stowed in the "locker"—a West Point expression for a long wooden box, about the size and shape of a coffin case, painted a dull green, and utterly innocent of lock or key. It is divided into four compartments, each a hollow cube of about eighteen inches cross section, each with separate lid, inside which are tacked some straps for brushes, shaving implements, etc.; and this locker is the sole stowaway the cadet can have for his summer belongings. Such books as are needed or permitted in camp must be neatly piled at the rear end of the locker, and behind it is stowed the broom. The white stone-ware washbowl rests, bottom outward, against the floor near the front end of the locker; the water bucket stands close beside it; a little wooden-framed mirror is perched on the front tent pole; and every item must be of the prescribed pattern, and purchased at the cadet commissary store, even to the soap that is placed behind the washbowl. Hypercritical visitors have been known to inquire if each piece of soap must be worn to uniform thickness, but the sarcasm has fallen harmless upon the armor of West Point authority. Every article has its prescribed place, and must be nowhere else, or the young gentleman whose name stands topmost on the little "orderly board" that decks the front tent pole will hear of it through the delinquency book within the next twenty-four hours. It would take the uninitiated visitor half a day to put one of these tents in proper order for inspection, but the expert "yearling" will do it in three minutes, and as the first drum taps for morning parade he issues from his domicile, buttoned to the throat in faultlessly fitting uniform, his collar, belts, gloves, cuffs, and trousers of glistening white, his shoes, belt plates, and brasses gleaming with polish, and his rifle in perfect order: a cambric handkerchief could not flick a particle of dust from his attire.

The company grounds are picturesque sights at this hour. Up by the guard tents numbers of gayly dressed spectators are sauntering in to take their accustomed seats in the grove at the west end. The band, headed by its stately drum-major,

comes marching across the plain from its barracks below the hill. A group of officers approaches from the distant "mess," and the sentry on No. 1 rattles his piece to "arms port," and the heights re-echo to his stentorian shout, "Turn out the guard—Commandant of Cadets!" or his similar announcement of the approach of some equally exalted functionary; the members of the guard scramble for the arm racks, seize their rifles, form ranks, and present arms with a unanimity and precision that would delight any man not accustomed to such displays of adulation. Down in camp, the company streets are alive with cadets in full dress awaiting the "fall in" signal of the second drum, and along the row of company officers' tents a dozen young satraps are winding themselves into their sashes as none but cadets ever think of doing, and only cadets succeed in obtaining so excellent a final effect. As an item of uniform, the sash, which used to be worn by all officers, is now restricted to the two grades which are best worth having—general and cadet; the intermediate are hardly worth mention in comparison with either—and no general in the army or out of it can beat a cadet lieutenant in the art of putting on a sash. The latter ties one end around the tent pole, steps off to its full length of seven or eight feet, then slowly winds himself into it until twice or thrice it has encircled his slender waist in a flat crimson girdle; then knots it in graceful loop behind the left hip, and the effect is complete.



PLEBE DRILL.

Suddenly the drum again taps sharply. The gray and white flocks in each company street resolve themselves into two long parallel files, elbow to elbow, that face suddenly outward from the centre of the camp at the last tap; the glistening rifles spring up to "support arms," and each first sergeant calls off his roll as though the last thing he were thinking of was the answering "here"; one after another the white-gloved hands snap the pieces down to the "carry" and "order" as each man answers to his name; the sergeant faces his captain with soldierly salute and takes his post; the captain whips out his shining sword; the lieutenants step to their posts—and then begins the sharp inspection. Man after man is passed under the scrutinizing eye of the young officer. A speck of rust about the rifle, a dingy belt plate, a soiled or rumpled collar, a tear in the glove, a spot on the trousers, dust on the shoes, a single button missing or unfastened, any one of these or similar solecisms, be it on part of First Class man or plebe, tent-mate or stranger, friend or foe, will probably be noted on the company delinquency book that day, and published by the adjutant to the whole battalion the next evening. The captain

is a man of few words; to the upper-class man a mere look tells what is amiss; to the plebe he frequently adds a brief admonition or reproof. Poor young bears! they have a host of troubles to encounter, and a thousand things to learn in less than a month. To see them, even when not in ranks or on duty, walking about camp, during their first summer at the Point, with their little fingers pressed to the seams of their trousers, and the palms of their hands flat to the front, so that the shoulders *have* to be square, and their backs flat as an ironing-board, one only wonders that even old age can ever bend or bow them.

Inspection over, there is a moment's breathing spell. Then the adjutant, with his sergeant-major and markers, appears at the head of the general parade, raises his hand in signal to the band, the drum-major whirls his baton, drums and fifes strike up the lively notes of "adjutant's call," the full band crashes into the martial melody of a spirited quickstep, and the four companies come striding forth. There is no moment's delay, but with the ease and grace of long practice the adjutant forms the line, the captains march their perfectly drilled commands to their appointed places, guides spring out to the front, ranks are dressed to the centre, the band abruptly ceases, and the ringing voice of the adjutant orders, "Guides posts!" Each in turn, the four companies are brought to the "carry," "order," and "parade rest," the drum-major whirls his baton again, there is a flourish of trumpets and drums, and then band and field music come "trooping" down in front of that statuesque line of gray and white. It is a sight well worth seeing any bright summer morning, and there are hosts of lookers on—mothers, sisters, and sweethearts by the dozen, each one of whom has in those motionless ranks some especial cadet who is the central object of her thoughts, however general may be the flow of conversation. Back to its post goes the band, after a bewildering countermarch, near the sentry on No. 6; there is another flourish, another abrupt stop to the music, and in its place there rings upon the morning air the clear young voice of the adjutant as he calls the line to attention, opens the ranks, then comes gleaming down to the centre, turns sharply to the right in front of the colors, and with quick, springy steps the most envied youth at the Point stalks out to the front, halts midway to the commanding officer, faces about, and at his next word arms clash to the "present." Once more he faces the dark blue figure standing solitary at the front, lowers his sword in graceful salute, and reports: "Sir, the parade is formed." The officer in command may be a hero of a dozen battles and "brevets," but to lookers on, cadet and civilian, 'tis safe to say he is an object of small consequence as compared with the graceful stripling who takes his place at his side. Possibly it is the consciousness of this fact that makes his own share in the ceremony so brief and perfunctory. He puts the battalion through a very short exercise in the manual, and then, with an air of evident relief, turns over the control of affairs to the adjutant once more. The first sergeants and the plume-crested colossus of a drum-major make their precise reports; then with simultaneous clash the officers return swords, and face toward the centre; the adjutant and his fellow-magnates close in front of the colors, face the commanding officer in a long line of black plumes and red sashes. "Forward, guide centre!" is the adjutant's next command, and at the word "march" the band again strikes up, and with perfect alignment a full score of young captains and subalterns march jauntily to the front, halt short at six yards from the lonely-looking party in sombre blue, together the white-gloved hands are raised in soldierly salute, together they drop, and the statuesque line becomes a scattering flock as the plumes and sashes scurry back to the tents, whither the companies march at the same instant. It often happens in camp that morning inspection follows instead of precedes dress parade as time is short. In this case the captains put their men through the ordeal while a detail from each company, conducted by the first sergeant, is proceeding to another, guard-mounting, the prettiest ceremony of the day.

To all but those "marching on" with the new guard this half-hour is the brightest between the rising and setting of the sun, for the moment inspection is over all cadets not on duty and who have friends among the lady spectators are mingling with them back of the guard tents, and fun and flirtation begin forthwith. It is a short half-hour, for all too soon the warning drum is thundering again, and

THE LIGHT BATTERY.

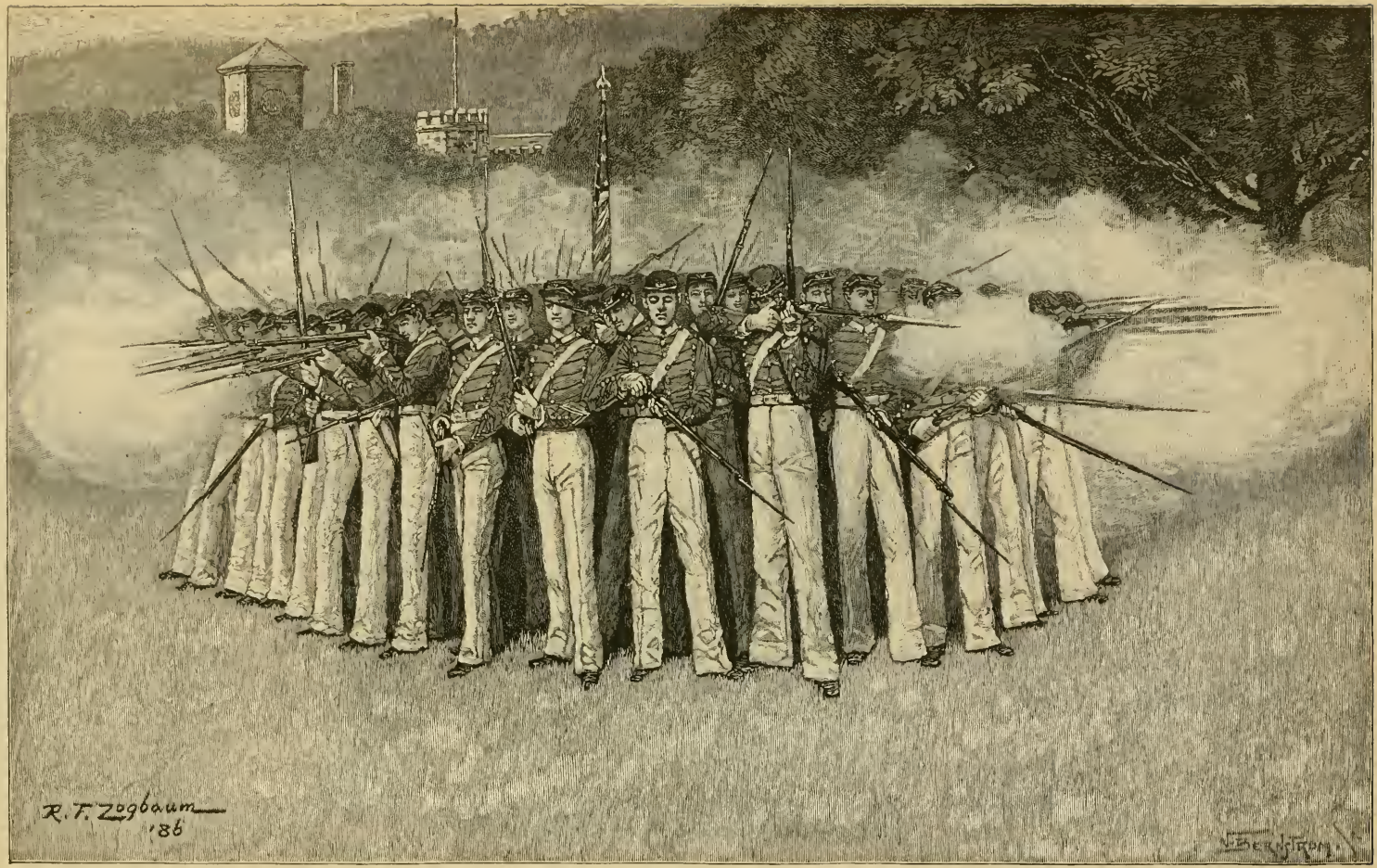
leave-takings are of the briefest description. Sharp at the stroke of nine the classes are again in ranks, and the hour of battery drill has come. The "plebes" march stiffly out to the field guns south of camp; the yearlings, wheeling into column of sections, swing jauntily off under their detail of First Class officers to where the battery horses have already been hitched to the limbers and caissons out on the cavalry plain, and that portion of the senior class not required as chiefs of platoon or section at the field batteries is already springing down the winding path to the "sea-coast" battery at the water's edge, and presently you will hear a thunder of great guns that will stun all Orange County—or would, but for the barriers of the massive hills that shut us in on every side.

The liveliest spectacle, however, is here on the plain, for of all the drills and exercises in which the cadet excels he is at his best in those of the mounted service. Daring horsemen are the youngsters after two years' practice in the riding hall, and light battery drill is a famous place for exhibition. Watch the boys as they go to their stations. The seniors, in their riding dress, gauntlets, and cavalry sabres, swing easily into the saddles of the somewhat vicious-looking steeds that are held in readiness for them, adjust their stirrups, take a preliminary and surreptitious dig with their spurred heels to test the mettle of their nags, then clatter off to their posts to look over the horses and drivers of their detachments. The yearlings in their natty shell jackets stand ready at the guns; the bugle blares the signal "cannoneers mount," and, like so many agile monkeys, they spring to their seats on the ammunition chests, and with another bugle blast, and rumble of hoof and wheel and clink of trunnion, away goes the battery down the gravelly plain. There are a few preliminary moves to warm them up to their work; the battery commander, a young artillery officer who knows his trade, swings them to and fro, faster and faster, from one formation to other—column, line, and battery—and then, as though ordered to check the advance of an enemy swarming up the heights and give him canister at short range, with cracking whips and plunging steeds and rattle and roar of hoof and wheel, and hoarse-throated commands and stirring bugle peals, up the plain they come at tearing gallop until opposite the crowd of spectators at the guard tents, when there is a short, sudden blast, a simultaneous shout from the "chiefs," a vision of rearing horses as the lieutenants and sergeants halt short on line with the brilliant guidon—generally the most picturesque horseman of the warlike throng, and *always* posted on the flank nearest the ladies—a flash of sabres in the air, a sudden "rein in" of the line of caissons, and gradual settle down to a stand, long before which, nimble as cats, the cannoneers have sprung from their seats, and are streaking it across the gap to where the chiefs are seated on their excited chargers. Around sweep the guns with sudden swirl that wellnigh capsizes them—the three youngsters on each limber seemingly hanging on as though seated on sticking plasters—there is a rattle and bang of pintle-hooks, hoarse shouts of "Drive on" to the gun teams; gray and white forms leap and sway in and out among the wheels; sponges and rammers whirl in air; there is a belch of flame, smoke, and thunder-cloud, a bellowing roar; another, another—half a dozen in quick succession; a thick sulphurous haze settles down on the plain and envelops guns and gunners; and suddenly comes another blare of bugle. "Cease firing" is the shout, and the mimic scene of Buena Vista is over. Even before the smoke has cleared away another order is given, with prompt, exciting response; plunging horses, cracking whips, a rush of teams, limbers, and caissons between the black muzzles of the guns; a sudden whirl about of wheels and handspikes, and the next instant smoke and flame are belching in thunder-claps over the very ground where stood the waiting teams only a moment before. Then comes still another signal, a stowing away of handspikes and rammers, a rapid rein-about of the limber teams, another blare, and away they go, the white legs of the cannoneers flashing in a race beside their bounding guns; a rush across the road to the edge of the grassy level beyond, another sudden whirl into battery, a thundering salute to the rocky heights to the west, an echoing roar from the great columbiads and Parrotts at the "sea-coast" down by the Hudson, and the Point fairly trembles with the shock and concussion. There is no hour of the day to match the excitement and *élan* of that of battery drill.

Ten o'clock puts an end to it. Back come all the classes to their tents, the yearlings glowing with exhilaration and life, the plebes big with prospective achievements in the same line, the First Class men dignified and deliberate, as becomes their station. There is but short respite. By 10.30 the drum again summons all to ranks, and away they go, in long, white-legged columns, the seniors to pontoon drill down at the bay, the yearlings to the laboratory, where they learn all manner of pyrotechny, the plebes to recitation in tactics, and thence to an hour's drill of a far different kind. West Point aims to make its graduates gentlemen as well as soldiers, and gentlemen must mingle in society to gain there the polish and ease which should mark the well-bred man. Good dancers have always been found among the cadets, but for years this was an elective accomplishment. Observant officers noted that as a rule only those cadets who danced were apt to seek the society of ladies, and every one knows that in "forming" the manners of a gentleman association with refined and cultured women is simply indispensable. Hence the now inflexible rule that every cadet must learn to dance, as he does to ride, fence, shoot, spar, and swim, and before he begins his long tussle with mathematics and science the embryo soldier is turned over to the daily ministration of a Turveydrop.

At one o'clock the whole battalion marches to dinner as to breakfast, except that on days of unusual warmth they are clad from head to foot in glistening white—helmets, shell jackets, and trousers all spotless as the driven snow. The First and Third classes take their turns with the dancing teacher during the early afternoon. At four o'clock "police call" sounds, and the entire space within the line of sentries is scrupulously "spruced up" by details from the lower classes. The whole battalion forms under arms as the sun goes westering down, and with the long skirmish lines firing in advance or retreat, rallying on the reserves and around the colors, or deploying at the run, volleying at imaginary charges of cavalry, or picking off the distant leaders of a smoke-shrouded adversary, all to the

THE "ROW" AT DRESS PARADE.



RALLY ON THE COLORS.

ringing accompaniment of skirmish calls on the key-bugles, the scene is beautiful and inspiring.

The Point begins toward sundown to fill up with carriages and omnibuses (General Scott always insisted on *omnibi*) from the many summer resorts along the river-bank below, and when the drum taps for evening parade the throng of spectators is far greater than at "troop," and the ceremony is still more stately. The bang of the sunset gun and the flutter to earth of the great garrison flag add vivid interest to nervous souls, and sometimes lead to sudden capsizing of camp-stools with their startled occupants, and to a consequently perceptible seismic effect on the usually stolid line. "Laughing in ranks" is one among the million military misdemeanors for which a cadet can acquire demerit, and a broad grin, be it noiseless as a kitten's footfall, is "laughter" in the inexorable military sense.

And so from sunrise to sunset, after which comes the march to supper, the day has been one of ceaseless duty and instruction, but so full of life, variety, and spirited movement that it is not in camp that the cadet finds cause to chafe at the monotony. There have even been blissful morning hours for the two dozen young fellows relieved at half past eight from guard duty, and given until dinner roll-call to recuperate. These may roam at will over the heights and ravines to the west, look down from the battlements of Fort Putnam upon that superb panorama of earth and water, the rock-bound promontory with its tented field, the glistening ribbon of river stretching away northward through the great gorge of the Highlands, the distant spires of Newburgh, the faint, mist-wreathed outlines of the Catskills —oh, what a view to look back upon in after years of isolation on the frontier, in lonely scout amid wastes of desert sage-brush and alkali! If the day be warm, the cadet may visit the bath-houses over near Target Hill, and tempt the swift tides of the Hudson under the wary eye of the German *Schwimm-meister*, who is so proud of the experts he makes in general athletics and with fist and foil and broadsword.

ON "FLIRTATION."

But there are attractions which outrival these, and still more likely, with some sweet-faced enslaver, the cadet may wander through the shades of that ever-beautiful "Chain Battery" walk, that long since resigned its official title in favor of one so infinitely more descriptive — Flirtation — and there barter his buttons for smiles that may serve to sweeten only the idle chat of a summer's hour, or inthrall him in a web of silken memories that will bind him close and closer, a willing victim in her maiden toils. Every decade our statisticians labor over the question of the shifting centre of population of these United States, but no controversy arises as to the actual centre of flirtation: all authorities unite on West Point.

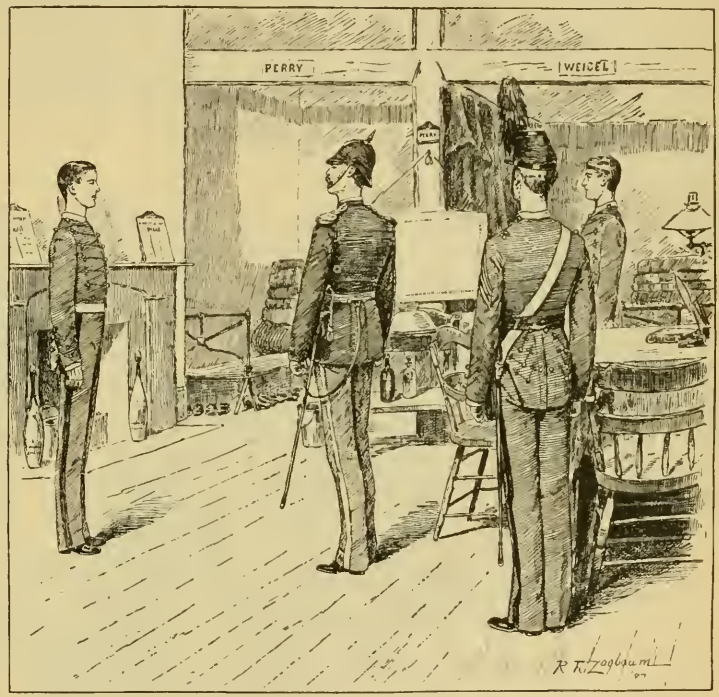
Evening is our young soldier's gala

THE GRADUATING HOP.

time. Three nights a week the grim corridors of the old "Academic" are alive with music, laughter, the swish of silken skirts, and animated movement to and fro of dozens of fair girls in dainty evening dress, and of slender cavaliers in gray and white, often brightened with crimson sash and glittering chevrons. Even the "hops" are run on military time. Precisely at the appointed hour the floor-manager signals to his musicians, and the first dance begins. Precisely at the designated moment, be it in the very midst of dreamy waltz or spirited Lancers, the inevitable and inexorable drum crashes through the resounding corridors its imperious summons; the dancers scurry away to the dressing-rooms; the ladies are bundled into the waiting 'buses or led away by faithful chaperons; the gray and white cavaliers exchange hurried yet often most effective good-nights with their fair partners; the drums and fifes strike up their shrill tattoo far over in camp; and away go the future hopes of the nation, scudding to their companies to avoid a "late." For the eighth and last time that day the sergeants call their rolls and report to their captains, the captains to the adjutant or officer of the day, while the "officer in charge," an army lieutenant, stands close at hand to see that all is in regular form. Then follow ten minutes' chat, subdued scuffle and laughter in the company streets while the youngsters are making down their beds for the night (nothing but blankets on the hard tent floors); then comes a sudden single tap on the snare-drum at the guard tents, sharp orders of "Put out those lights!" two more similar taps, and before the last has died away the darkness of Erebus has settled down on camp, and all is silent as the grave.

For a few minutes the cadet officers patrol their company streets to insure order, and then the officers of the guard are left in charge. The sentries pace their silent posts, watchful, wary, for they know not when, nor how, nor how many disturbers may appear, and the faintest lack of efficiency is visited by prompt punishment. "I did not see," or "I did not hear," is an excuse that is never accepted, for sentries must be all eyes, ears, wits, and pluck. Even First Class men when on post are

subjected to manifold tests of their knowledge of sentry duty, but to the plebe the first few nights on guard are of vivid interest. Time was when, as a means of making these youthful guardsmen experts in their art, the authorities "winked" at what was known as "deviling plebes on post"—a species of horse-play that had infinite zest for all the participants except the plebe. Spectres, spooks, goblins damned, ghosts of André and Arnold, "great hiyankidanks," cavalry on broomsticks, its tents at the tap of the drum, and marches with flying colors to the great gray barracks. Here the young soldiers are housed for the long academic year, and for ten months of unremitting study. So long as the weather will permit, there is one drill each afternoon but Saturday and Sunday, the weekly inspection of the battalion under arms, and the daily guard mount and parade, but now everything is subordinated to the mental training, and a dozen articles the size of this could give but faint de-



SUNDAY MORNING INSPECTION.

light batteries of wheelbarrows, cow-boys with lassos—each and all must be seen, challenged, halted, until examined by a corporal of the guard, and as all were apt to come at the same instant, and from every possible direction, the unlucky sentry was often at his wits' end; often, too, whirled off his post and roped into Fort Clinton ditch. But "deviling plebes," as conducted in the rough old days, is one of the lost arts at the Point.

Barrack life is a far different thing. On the 28th of August the "furlough class" returns to duty, the corps strikes

scription of the course of study. Let us look rather to the mode of life as now prescribed.

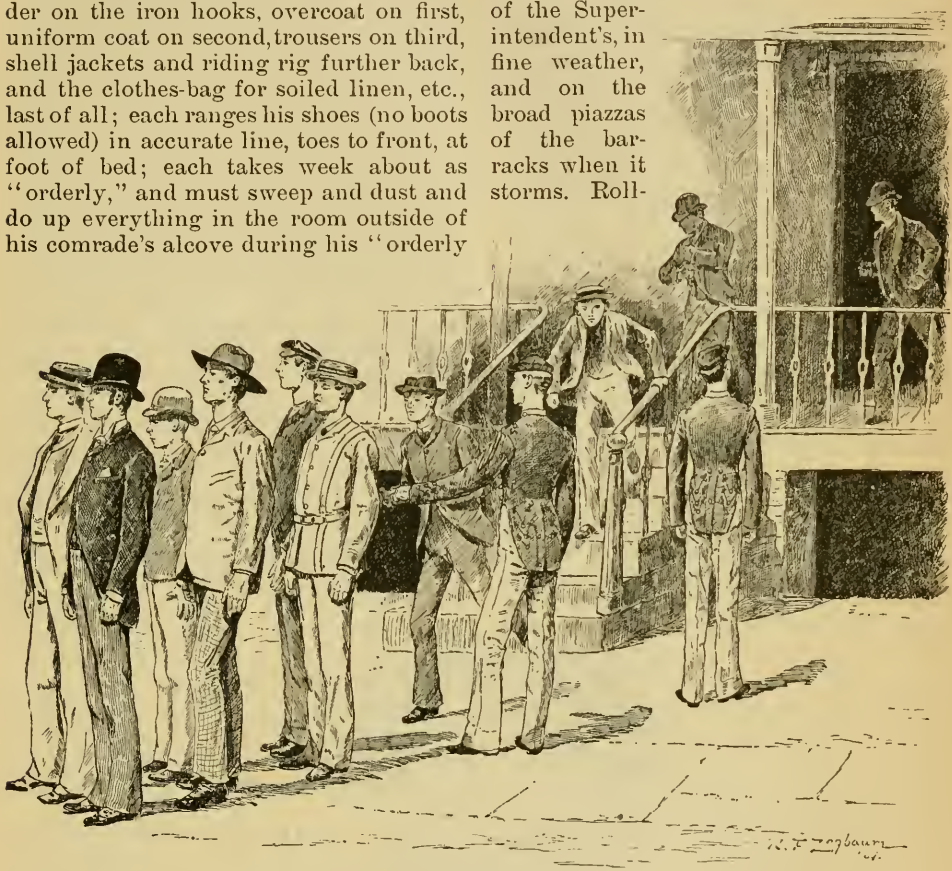
Four stories high are the barracks, with spacious cellars underneath; dry, well ventilated, heated by steam, and lighted by gas. Ten hallways with iron stairs pierce the massive building from front to rear, each hallway being termed a "division" of barracks. Each division has four rooms on a floor, two on each side of the hall, and all rooms except those in the great towers are of the same size, shape, and finish. The end farthest from the win-

dow is partitioned off into two alcoves, with a cross-piece for curtains. Each alcove contains an iron bedstead against the wall, and a row of iron hooks against the partition. Each room is furnished with a stout table, an iron mantel, a double set of open shelves called a "clothes-press," a little shelf for helmets and dress hats, a wooden arm rack, and wooden pegs for caps and accoutrements. Two cadets, as a rule, occupy each room, each having an alcove to himself and the above-named sumptuous list of furniture to begin house-keeping. Each purchases at the commissary store a single mattress for his bed, and, if he choose, a set of curtains of prescribed pattern and color for his alcove. In common they provide a wooden wash-stand, two buckets, two wash-bowls (we used to get along with one), a broom, a candle box (for anything but candles, which are "contraband" in barracks), and a little wooden-framed mirror. Each stows his white trousers, under-clothing, shirts, belts, collars, cuffs, gloves, shaving tools, brushes, and combs on their appropriate shelves in his half of the clothes-press; each item in a separate pile of its own kind, neatly folded, folded edge to the front, square and vertical and on line with front edge of shelf. All books except those in actual use are squarely stood up, backs to front,

EN RECONNAISSANCE.

against the wall on top of clothes-press. Each cadet neatly prints his name and puts it over his shelves, his accoutrements, his alcove, and in the slips of the "orderly board"; each folds his bedding, mattress and all, on the head of his bedstead, and not until tattoo can it be taken down; each hangs his clothing in prescribed order on the iron hooks, overcoat on first, uniform coat on second, trousers on third, shell jackets and riding rig further back, and the clothes-bag for soiled linen, etc., last of all; each ranges his shoes (no boots allowed) in accurate line, toes to front, at foot of bed; each takes week about as "orderly," and must sweep and dust and do up everything in the room outside of his comrade's alcove during his "orderly

is incomplete as to interior detail), dust his furniture, and prepare for the inspection which must come at the next roll of the drum. Then he has his early breakfast, and time for some study before recitations begin at eight. Guard is mounted with all formality on the infantry plain, in front of the Superintendent's, in fine weather, and on the broad piazzas of the barracks when it storms. Roll-



"CANDIDATES TURN OUT PROMPTLY!"

week," and from the first of September until the middle of June he can count on that room's being inspected at least twice each day and sometimes oftener, and on being himself "spotted" on the demerit books if the least thing be found out of place or in disorder.

At daybreak the roar of the *reveille* gun and the thunder of the drums summon him to roll-call, and he goes down those iron stairs four and five at a jump. After that he has half an hour in which to sweep, settle things, make up his bed, wash and dress for the day (*reveille* garb

calls are as regular, though not as frequent, as in camp, but from 8 A.M. to 1 P.M. no cadet can enter any room in barracks except his own, or leave his own except to go to recitation. From 2 until 4 P.M. the same rule obtains. At 4.15 in spring and fall are the artillery or infantry drills, and at some seasons the riding lessons of the Third Class. At sunset is the inevitable "retreat" parade; then an hour, perhaps, for exercise and relaxation. Supper in due course, and half an hour afterward the bugle wails the dismal "call to quarters," which summons every cadet to his room.

In ten minutes the sentries inspect. "All right?" they ask, as they make their hurried visit to the different rooms, and the answer covers a multitude of things, but is conclusive; and so the evening study hours begin. You may pass the brightly lighted front of barracks any wintry evening and hear not a sound but the tramp of the sentries on the lower floor. A cadet who quits his room to visit that of a comrade does it at no little risk. If seen or heard by the sentry, or caught at it by the "tactical officer" or officer of the day, he is booked for certain demerits, and the punishment of "extras," or confinement during the one hebdomadal half-holiday.

One hundred demerits in six months will sever the connection of any cadet with the academy and the military service; and with very small exercise of ingenuity a cadet can pick up the entire number in a single day, and do it without leaving his room either. It was a cadet tradition that the gifted Edgar Allan Poe showed a phenomenal ability in that line.

Rigid as is the discipline and unbending the routine, time fairly flies through those months of barrack life. The cadet marches to his recitations with the same precision and silence that he marches to parade, and is no sooner out of one recitation-room than he must begin preparation for another. As a rule, there are but three recitations a day—two in the morning and one in the afternoon. Mathematics, mechanics, and engineering are disposed of between eight and eleven, each half of each class reciting ninety minutes, and each class being divided into sections of ten to twelve cadets to facilitate instruction. Each section has its own recitation-room, and its own instructor in the person of a young officer who is especially skilled in the science or study being pursued. From eleven until one, chemistry, geology, French, and Spanish are the main topics; and in the drowsy afternoons history, law, and drawing keep the youngsters busy. All this sounds as though the work were sedentary, and that no exercise crept in, but such is far from the case. The plebes have their daily gymnastics under a skilful teacher, and the three upper classes have the liveliest kind of exercise in their lessons in horsemanship. West Point riding deserves a chapter by itself, for it would be a revelation to the city schools. Bareback, with crossed stirrups, with every kind of a horse except an easy one, the boys have to rough it for a year or more before they get a foot-rest. The big, gloomy riding-hall has its agile tenants day after day during the fall and winter months, and few indeed are the boys who are not time and again rolled in the tan-bark or pitched headlong over the hurdles. A cat with its reputed plurality of lives would be dead a dozen times over in taking half the chances those laughing youngsters will eagerly seek in their three years at cavalry and light-artillery drill, but it seems impossible to kill a cadet, and just as hard to scare one. More reckless, daring, graceful riding one need never look to see than among the Seniors when they come before the Board of Visitors in June; and all through the spring, varied by occasional scouts and reconnoissances over the rough mountain roads, the drills of the cavalry battalion on the plain are sights that one can never tire of watching; while after an hour's "running at the heads," or leaping hurdles bareback, picking up handkerchiefs from the ground, or mounting and dismounting at a gallop, the boys come back from the hall covered with glory, and tan-bark, but with famous appetites and few bruises. No, there is no especial lack of exercise even in the weeks of hardest study. Only during those dread examinations in January do some of the youngsters seem to lose their color; but the questions they then have to answer, the two weeks' ordeal they then have to undergo, are enough to scare an encyclopædia.

The winter soon wears away, the springtime comes, and then June, the month of roses—and graduation. Even as the stalwart Seniors are passing their final examinations the Point begins to fill up with several score of young strangers—shy, suspicious youths, in civilian garb of a dozen different fashions, but in singularly unanimous frame of mind. One and all they have heard rumor of the rough usages that formerly surrounded the initiation of the new cadet, and are on the watch for similar demonstrations. No graduate will attempt to deny that there was a time in the history of the academy when there was a vast deal of "hazing," and that it was continued for the entire period of camp; but the "plebes" themselves would seldom make complaint or

give information of their tormentors; nine out of ten took it all grimly or good-humoredly, and those who whined or protested at all were sure to be the head devils of the next year's work. "Deviling" was ordinarily conducted with rare discrimination; those young men who were "solid," self-respecting, putting on no airs, and minding their own business, managed to get along with very little trouble; whereas the yearlings went wild with ecstasy over a bumptious new-comer with a high opinion of himself. His life was made a burden to him, and no mistake. Still, no bodily harm was ever inflicted except through some unforeseen accident. Hazing as conducted at one time or other in every college in the United States has had far more that was really harmful about it than the system as it prevailed at the Point; but the latter was public property, and far more notice was taken accordingly. At most colleges, too, it was the meek and most friendless of the Freshmen who came in for the liveliest hazing; the rich and influential had means of escape. At West Point the very opposite was the case: the higher in rank or riches was the father, the more presumably had the son to be "taken down," to reach the rabidly democratic standard of the corps.

In course of time, however, public sentiment set in very strongly against the practice. It took hard work to uproot it, for the ingenuity and activity of the corps are something phenomenal; but the thing has been done, and to-day the ancient and objectionable custom is but the shadow of a formerly vigorous substance. The plebes are drilled as sharply and disciplined as thoroughly as ever before, the line of demarcation between theirs and the senior classes is still maintained, but the tricks and pranks, the fagging that rendered life a burden, and the "yanking" that made night hideous, and with them all that had a tendency to the harmful, have been practically abolished.

In three-quarters of a century of usefulness and success the Point has known no era of higher scholarship, of sounder discipline, and of more brilliant promise than that which culminates with the administration of the last five years; and the report of the Board of Visitors of 1886, several of whose number were animated by an unusually searching spirit of investigation, and stimulated possibly by complaints of undue severity and needless restrictions, has stamped its every military feature, drill, discipline, and instruction, with the seal of its unqualified approval.

A CENTRAL SOUDAN TOWN.

BY JOSEPH THOMSON.

THE general public, gathering its impressions from contemporary literature, has come to look upon the whole of central Africa—or, in other words, that part undiluted by contact or intermixture with foreign or Asiatic races—as a region wholly inhabited by barbarians, chiefly characterized by extraordinary customs, the most degraded forms of fetichism and cannibalism, with, it may be, a decided taste for gin.

That this popular notion is erroneous in a marked degree it will be the object of this article to point out. With this view I propose to describe a town inhabited by purely African races, and situated in the central part of that continental zone called the Soudan—a term now too often popularly restricted to the eastern division, or Egyptian Soudan.

Let us imagine that it is the month of June, near the close of the dry season; that, personally conducted by me, a party, consisting of the readers of this article, have voyaged along the west coast of Africa to the mouth of the river Niger, safely passed the malarious region of the delta and lower reaches of that famous river, and then, by excessively weary overland marches, come from the south to the neighborhood of the central Soudan town which has been the goal of our pilgrimage. As we struggle up a low rocky hill of lava aspect we are reminded by the terrific heat that Herodotus describes the people we are now among as being in his time strangely characterized by the daily custom of cursing and shaking their fists at the sun at mid-day. We have long ceased to wonder at this, for we have enjoyed experiences unknown to the illustrious geographer, and exposed as we are to the sweltering heat of his solar majesty unmitigated by the shadow of a cloud, we are painfully aware of a tendency to revert to the primitive habit.

The worst, however, is over, and the crest of the hill is reached, and as we pause to regain breath and mop our streaming faces, we may, as is the habit of personally conducted parties, improve our mind by a few judicious remarks tending to make clear our whereabouts. We are now at a distance of 1500 miles south of the Mediterranean, about the same west from the Atlantic, though only about 800 miles north from the Gulf of Guinea, so that there is no mistake about our being in the heart of Africa. Immediately to the north of us lie the wild and inhospitable plateau lands of Asben, passing into the barren wastes of the Sahara; to the west rolls the Niger, and beyond lie regions yet unpenetrated by the restless energy of the white man, for its savage tribes and pestiferous forests are more formidable barriers than even waterless and burning deserts; to the south lie the countries which we have just traversed, equally deadly and dangerous, and which, like the district to the west, would have been impenetrable but for the fact that the Niger winds in glistening reaches, cleaving a way through the primeval forests and malarious delta to the ocean, as if for the special advantage of the ubiquitous traveller; eastward extend wildernesses as barren and hazardous as those to the north. It will thus be seen that if our town is tinged with the bright flush of dawning civilization, it owes little to its environment.

The landscape which lies below and in front of us, owing to the unseasonable period of the year, is not by any means an attractive one, though in its apparent desert-like barrenness not without a certain element of impressiveness. The scorching dry season, now drawing near a close, has transformed the whole country into a series of bare rocks, glaring sands, and red fields, which seem incapable of raising anything for either man or beast. The air heated on these furnace-like plains rises in hazy undulations, and comes wafted to us laden with dust in an almost unbreathable condition. The only feature which relieves the unutterable monotony of the scene is the occurrence here and there of grim, rugged, solitary trees, which bid defiance to the scorching sun and arid soil, and the appearance of a serpentine line of green stretching snake-like along the plain, indicating the verdure-clad banks of a dried-up stream winding westward toward the Niger.

If we now turn our attention to the northern aspect of the hill on which we stand, we shall observe extending forward a low broken platform some three

THE LEAVENWORTH SCHOOL

By Captain Charles King,
U. S. A.

New York:
Harper Brothers.

THE LEAVENWORTH SCHOOL.

BY CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

WHILE West Point is the cadet school of the army, and each year sees its graduating class commissioned into service, it must not be supposed that the theoretical work ends here. Referring to this very subject in his address to a class of young officers just completing their four years' course at the academy, a distinguished soldier warned them that while they might be considered to have finished their preliminary instruction, their *education* was now just about to begin.

Of course it was true, said the young gentlemen, as they stowed away their long-coveted diplomas; that is, so far as the scientific branches of the fighting force—the engineers, ordnance, and artillery—are concerned. Certainly their officers have much to study and much to learn, or they fall behind in the professional race. They have schools of instruction and application, the engineers at Willet's Point, the artillery at Old Point Comfort, but just how that remark was to apply to the bulk of the graduates, to the young soldiers joining the cavalry and infantry regiments out on "the plains," was something they did not so clearly see.

The time was, in the very recent past, when the officers of the line of the army had little leisure and less opportunity for book study. It is a pet theory of civilian censors that army life is one of indolence and lack of occupation; but it is safe to say that such critics know nothing of the service west of the Missouri as it is to-day, and still less of what it was in the ten or fifteen years that immediately followed our civil war. Here and there over the broad frontier were scattered little detachments of foot or horse, often a mere company at a given point, guarding some party of engineers or surveyors, or watching the movements of a horde of savages who seemed thirsting for a pretext on which to break their pledges to the government and to lash out upon the war-path. Those were days of isolation and hardship, whose monotony was mended only by a remedy that, in view of its fatal results, was often worse than the malady; but Indian fighting was all the diversion that circumstances permitted, and every officer and man was studying his trade practically and in face of the foe. There is no place here for dissertation on the subject, but the fact remains that west of the Missouri no rod of road was surveyed, no rood of land was tilled, until swept by the rifles of "the regulars." And as for the great railways that now span the continent, and have brought the very wilderness under tribute, the mile-posts of their longest are not enough in number to score the

lives of our officers and men laid down in Indian battle during the years it took to build them. For the nation they were years of slumberous peace, and very little was known or cared about what was going on "out West." And the nation would doubtless be greatly surprised to hear how many hundred gallant lives were sacrificed in the ten years that succeeded the war of the rebellion, and how many hundred officers and men bear upon their bodies this day the scars of Indian arrow or deadlier bullet.

As road after road was built, however, and the various tribes were subjected or placated, as happened to be the policy of the Interior Department at the time, the troops were called in from outlying camp and scattered bivouac. Here and there over the wide West there sprang up big clusters of barn-like structures, arranged about a square or diamond-shaped "parade," and magnificently termed a fort, in defiance of its structural weakness and the fact that the pluck of the garrison was its only parapet. Neither were they ornamental, these military caravansaries; but all the same under their ugly wing all manner of little settlements nestled for shelter, waxed strong and populous, and then, when they had become self-reliant in their populace and covetous of adjoining lands, did we not hear their representatives in Congress assembled, for whom our chaplain hebdomadally prayed, and we, as in duty bound, responded "Amen!"—did we not hear these orators and statesmen denouncing us as a "menace to the liberties of the people," and demanding that we be ordered elsewhere, and our reservation be thrown open for settlement? Many a frontier fortress, built at fabulous expense to Uncle Sam, and correspondent profit to the contractors, has in this way outlived its usefulness, and seen its blades beaten into pruning-hooks and its sheltering barracks into kindling-wood for its quondam *protégés*. Many a name that recalls the stirring days along the old "Smoky Hill Route," and fierce battle with Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arrapahoe, has faded from the records; and bustling towns have sprung up around the site where Harker, Larned, Zarah, Wallace, and McPherson once were only frontier forts, but "monarch of all they surveyed."

But besides these ramshackle tenements, that must have cost at the rate of a dollar a shingle, the government owned some fine reservations, with solid and unpicturesque "quarters" of brick or stone, and two of these were in the thriving State of Kansas. One after another the nation gave up its claim on the various military posts in favor of this young sister, as she strode from hindermost to head of the wheat-producing commonwealths, but held on to two or three which were of strategic importance, and during the administration of General Sherman at the head of the army the largest and finest of these became the seat of a new army school.

It was rather a problem, the establishment of that school. We had maintained, as has been said, something of the kind for the benefit of the engineers, and an artillery school at Fortress Monroe for the finishing touches to be given our gunners; but here came a proposition to found a school for the instruction of the officers of the cavalry and infantry arms. Its origin seems as vague as the instructions to its first commanders. General Pope, who had long been at the head of the "Department of the Missouri," is said to have conceived the idea of having an entire regiment of infantry or cavalry garrisoned at one big post and taught practically all manner of military knowledge that would be useful in the field, each regiment in the department to come in turn; but at the head-quarters of the army it was decided to found a school both practical and theoretical for the benefit of the officers of "the line," and rather to the disgust of the first batch of presumable beneficiaries, the experiment came to a head in 1881.

Pupils there were in plenty, since the whole army list lay open, but professors were lacking; so were text-books, maps, models, apparatus, desks, chalk, blackboards, stoves and fuel, and the dozens of things a school must have before it is equipped for work. The General of the Army was a man whom obstacles, as we all know, only inspired, and he brushed this aside, as he had greater ones, with the simple mandate, "Go and do it—anyhow."

Of the early history of the school, perhaps the least said, the soonest mended. The organizers chose a curriculum which was interesting as an experiment, but had faint attractions for the bulk of the pupils. Many of the students of the origi-

nal detail were men who had enjoyed no advantages of early education, and had long since become resigned to the prospect of worrying along without one.

FROM "SHERIDAN'S RIDE" ON THE BLUFFS.

Appointees from the ranks or from civil life being largely predominant among them, it was decided by the authorities that arithmetic, grammar, geography, history, etc., were indispensable to their higher comprehension of the military art, and were concerned to discover that there were not a few veterans among their stalwart pupils who had managed to survive through a devastating war and years of frontier service without the faintest conception of Sturm's Theorem, or caring a Continental who signed the Magna Charta. It is to the credit of the service that while both teachers and pupils had many doubts as to whether the curriculum were really of lasting benefit, most of their number went to work with a will and did their best; and as for the backsliders, it was not the fact that they had to study and recite that troubled them, so much as the conviction

that they were burning the midnight oil in cramming solid pages of wisdom that might have been digested earlier in life, but were provocative of a mental dyspepsia now.

There was something very alluring about this proposed school down there in that beautiful wooded bluff country around Fort Leavenworth. Visions of manœuvres of large bodies of horse and foot; of brigade drills; campaign marches; field reconnoissances; and surveying; planning of earthworks, siege approaches, and mines; pontoon and trestle building; experiments with modern arms and systems of tactics; comparisons of the various European formations; study of the European *manége* and its possible application to our plains and mountains; lectures on the great campaigns of history; interesting problems in minor tactics; grand guards, outposts; partisan and picket service—these and others of like calibre were conjured up as among the possibilities; but the dream was soon shattered. The student officer came down from the heights of a visionary Parnassus to grapple with Hagar's Arithmetic. Those who had acquired a certain education in earlier life were spared this reversion to the days of their "teens," and given a course in Military and International Law, the "Operations of War," Field Fortifications and Outposts; but one-half their number went back to the pursuits of early youth. The authorities had magniloquently styled the new establishment the "School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry," the War Department stripped off a shade or two, and called it the "United States Infantry and Cavalry School," but the irreverent and unwilling pupil derisively dubbed it the "Kindergarten."

"Give a dog a bad name," and you know the result. The school had one at the outset, and there followed a period of hard pulling—both ways. But the powers were unmoved from their stern purpose: the school went on; so did the pupils; and by-and-by it became a fixture; and now it is a fact, but a very different thing from what it was six years agone. Through much tribulation and vexation of spirit it has passed the experimental stage, and come forward a claimant for honors.

On the right bank of the big Missouri, only a few miles above the sudden and final eastward bend, is the old town of Leavenworth, once prodigally hopeful, but now left in the lurch by luckier towns along the trunk lines "'cross continent"; and just a long rifle-shot away from its northern skirts there rises from the river a range of beautifully wooded bluffs. There, several years before the war, was built the old frontier station of Fort Leavenworth, and now it is the most populous military township in the country, the seat of the once anathematized "School of Application." It is well worth a visit at any season of the year, despite the heat of midsummer, but is never so attractive as in May and early June.

The massive buildings of the old permanent post are nearly hidden by the foliage. As we enter the main gate the slopes to the right are crowned by the walls of the once formidable arsenal and its out-buildings, now used as the head-quarters of the Department of the Missouri. North of these, on the ridge between us and the river bluffs, are the commodious and broad-verandaed homes of the general commanding the department and the officers of his staff; and then straight ahead there opens out before us a broad quadrangle, carpeted with a rich, soft, vivid green, bordered by stately elms, and shaded here and there by beautiful clusters of grand old trees, bounded by broad graded roads, and hemmed in by the main buildings of the school itself. This is the enclosure of old Fort Leavenworth.

We have come without stop, for the strains of martial music and the distant glint of arms tell that some one of the ceremonies of the day is taking place, and thanks to our early start from town, we are just in time for guard mount. The dew is not yet off the grass, the birds are flitting and chirping from bough to bough, sunshine and shadow alternate on the beautiful carpet of the parade, and the band, in cool summer dress and white helmets, pours forth rich, ringing melody as the "details" come marching out from the barrack behind the western trees.

Except for these barracks and one long, austere, prison-like structure on the eastern front—the abode of most of the bachelor officers—the parade is surrounded by roomy, cozy, bower-like cottages, all covered with climbing vines and hidden by flowering plants, and these are the quarters of the colonel commanding the school,

THE GUARD MOUNT.

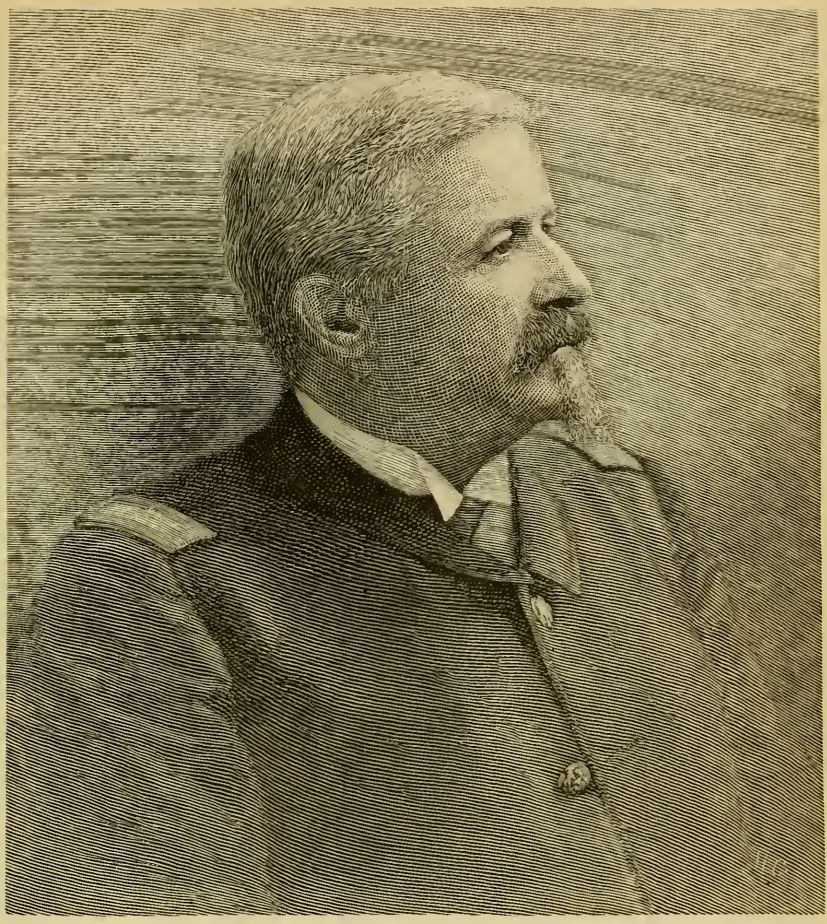
and of the senior officers of the corps of instructors. Early as is the hour, there are glimpses here and there of graceful feminine forms upon the verandas, and where these are seen there are sure to be attendant groups of martial figures, generally slender, erect, and distinguished by snugly fitting "blouses" and by bright blue trousers whose sides are decked with broad stripes of cool white or glowing yellow. It is breakfast-time all over the garrison, and women whose lives have been spent within sound of the drum are not apt to leave their coffee to gaze at a little display they can see any day in the year. Those whom we see among the vines and flowers of the porches, or strolling along the shaded walks with their attendant escorts, are young belles from elsewhere, visiting relations at Leavenworth, and taking a peep at army life that may result in a lasting acquaintance with it, unless all signs fail in such dry weather as that of a Kansas June. The escorts are, of course, the young "student officers," making hay while the sun shines, and forgetful, during the brief half-hour of guard mounting, of the sterner work that must fill up the day.

Meantime, however, the soldierly ceremony goes on, regardless of the coquetry along the neighboring verandas or the swarms of merrily laughing children who are chasing along the borders of the parade. The band plays a spirited Hungarian mazurka, while the acting adjutant and the officer of the guard, both students, are making their inspection of the statuesque line of soldiery. The rifles of the infantry and the carbines of the dismounted troopers are carefully overhauled, and every item of attire scrutinized. Then follows a sparkling waltz, which sets some enthusiastic couples to dancing behind the screening vines of the piazzas, but is powerless to move a muscle of the guard, standing solidly at "parade rest," with their eyes apparently fixed on vacancy. The waltz ceases, and then, after the "present" to the officer of the day, who stands in solemn grandeur at the northern limit of the grassy lawn, the little detachment wheels into column, and to the liveliest marching music makes the circuit of the parade, and passes in review before the official to whose guardianship the destinies of the garrison are confided for the next twenty-four hours. The swords of the officers are lowered in graceful salute, the drum-major whirls his baton and wheels his bandsmen out of column, and then, duly installed, the guard tramps away over the green to "take over" the property and prisoners from its predecessor.

This, however, is a daily feature of almost every post, from Preble in Maine to the Presidio of San Francisco. The next scene of the day is one that is distinctive and characteristic of the school. We are in the midst of examination week, and the subject that happens to come foremost this morning is Infantry Tactics.

On the second floor of one of the red brick buildings west of the parade is a long, well-lighted room whose Venetian windows open out upon a broad gallery. Around three sides of the room, opposite the light, is a raised dais and a continuous line of black-board. On the window side, with their backs to the light, are the examiners and several members of the Board of Visitors. All—the board, the examiners, and the pupils—are officers of the army of the United States, and sharp at nine o'clock the friendly, laughing chat suddenly ceases, and the first name is called. The secretary of the school, a tall, distinguished-looking cavalry officer, hands a slip of paper to the man who steps forward from the doorway, and so one after another a dozen subalterns of infantry and cavalry, some youthful and alert, some mature in years and grave in demeanor, receive their problems, and go to the board to illustrate by drawings and then fully describe their methods of solution.

While they are at work it is well to look around the room, for there are men here who have a history. The senior in rank wears upon his shoulder the silver star of a brigadier-general. He is a man of marked soldierly bearing, with clear, penetrating eyes and clean-cut features. His face is closely shaved but for the bristling reddish mustache, and as he stands by the window chatting in low tones with the commandant of the school he looks what he is, the very type of the American officer. One of the "star five" of his class at West Point, commander of one of the best and bravest of volunteer regiments at the outbreak of the war, winning the double stars of a major-general in that stubborn conflict, and the eagles of a colonel in the regular service, he is one of the younger brigadiers of the army to-day;



ALEXANDER McD McCOOK, COMMANDANT.

and his next important duty after the revision of the course of instruction at the school is something of far different and more stirring kind—the suppression of a dangerous Indian revolt in the far Northwest, and it is handled as well and as summarily. When Sword-Bearer, the chief of the malcontents, falls pierced with the bullets of the cavalry carbines, his followers lose heart, and the outbreak is stifled in a day.

The commandant is another man with a history. Perhaps he is the more widely known of the two, for he comes of a stock that is famous for its soldiers, and he bears a name that all Americans honor. Stoutly built, with keen blue eyes and florid complexion, sturdy and stocky as a Jersey bull, and with not a little of that taurine's pugnacity and determination, the commandant is a man whose whole being is wrapped up in his profession, and who is emphatically a soldier. Famous as a division and corps commander in those early days of the war when ill-luck seemed to cling to every man who rose so suddenly, he has spent his lifetime in the service, and knows "from a to izzard" every detail of a soldier's needs. It is to him that the great changes that have come over the school are mainly due, and to his persistence that the course has become what it is—a practical scheme for the instruction of the line officers of the army. To this object, as to the discipline of the school, he has given untiring energy and his best efforts, and as a man fitted to carry out his views, his looks do not belie him.

Along the tables in front of the Board

of Examiners are a number of sheets of drawing-paper, on each side of which is delineated—on some in colors, on others in ink—a map of Fort Leavenworth with the country to the north and northwest. Every road, every bridge, ford, stream, and bridle-path, every building, every height, wood, thicket, field, melon patch, or orchard, is fully indicated, though with more or less artistic skill; and each member of the class is required to show what disposition he would make of a force of thirty thousand men—infantry, cavalry, and artillery, in proper proportion—to defend that position of Fort Leavenworth from the attack of superior forces known to be advancing from the north. It is a good test, and one that calls for a knowledge of the powers of the three arms of the service and many of the principles of modern warfare. It calls forth much individuality too, for an examination of the plans shows that in many details there is wide difference of opinion as to the proper placing of portions of the force. They are unanimous in one thing, however. There is a broad open valley on the north, "covered" by the wooded heights in rear of the post, and commanded by all the ground to the south. There is not a man apparently who does not so dispose his main line as to compel the enemy to attempt the crossing of that valley under the continuous fire of the defence, and in almost every case the embankment of the narrow-gauge railway is used to excellent advantage. All this is to test their knowledge of higher tactical combinations. The subjects on the board are problems in minor tactics. In its general character the task of one officer is similar to those of all the others, and any one will answer as a specimen. The young lieutenant now explaining his work has been required to throw a battalion of eight companies of infantry into double column; then form line of battle on the right flank by two movements; then to "ploy" into close column by division, on first division, left in front; then to change direction by the right flank; and finally, after deploying once more into line of battle, to place the battalion in its original position. His chalk sketch illustrates the various combinations; he gives in full every command of the colonel and those of the captains, and explains in detail just how each movement must be executed. It is not enough that he tell what the duties of one officer may be: he must be able to instantly take the place of any of them, from colonel down, and to show any man in the command just where he should go, how he should get there, and what he must do on reaching the spot. He must know to an inch the position of every officer, every guide, file-closer, or private soldier, and be able to stand a cross-fire of questioning; for, one after another, the whole board may "take a shy" at him. It is the same with every study theoretically pursued at the school, and there was similar thoroughness in the days of its greatest unpopularity. Whether the old course was well chosen or not was a matter the instructors were not expected to publicly discuss. Their duty was to teach as thoroughly as they could, and by rigid examination assure themselves that their pupils either did or did not study. There were some few men whom they could not teach, perhaps; but there were more whose knowledge they could not and did not accurately gauge.

But it is not in the examination halls that the casual visitor will be most interested. What he or she may prefer most naturally to see are the military exercises in the open air, and no post in the army can present so attractive a variety as Leavenworth.

Projecting westward from the old quadrangle, or east parade, is a roadway lined on the north side by brick barracks and offices for a few hundred yards, and then by a long row of cottages occupied by the officers of the garrison and their families. All this section of the post is termed the "West End," and is quite a little community in itself. Directly in front of the officers' quarters, and across the road, is a broad, open field stretching away southward, and here, for the present, at least, are held all the mounted drills and exercises, and those ceremonies of parade in which the cavalry and the light battery act in conjunction with the infantry. The drill of a battery, with its plunging horses and booming guns and quick, dashing evolutions, is always a stirring sight, while the hoarse shouted commands and pealing bugle calls make the welkin ring even when the guns are silent. But one may see at Leavenworth something new to even veteran light artillerists—a perfect battery drill without bugle note or whisper of command. True, it was one of the finest batteries in all

A GRAND REVIEW AT THE "WEST END."

America that accomplished the feat during the late examination week, but it went through it all with an ease and finish as though the very horses had put their heads together beforehand and decided just what should be done. Fancy eight matched teams of glossy bays—four horses to the team — each "near" horse mounted by a rider who controlled the movements of his mate, the "off" horse; each team hitched to its battery carriage, whether gun or caisson; each carriage bearing its quota of cannoneers sitting erect with folded arms, and the long red plumes of their helmets streaming in the wind as the guns bounded over the springy turf; and fancy the whole complicated machine moving in perfect unison this way, that way, every way, wheeling, reversing, or countermarching, at walk, trot, or mad gallop, and not a word spoken or sound heard beyond the rumble of twoscore wheels or muffled thunder of tenscore hoofs. It was all simple enough: every eye in the battery was on the sinewy figure of the tall captain, who rode well out to the front, sabre in hand, and every signal, point, cut, or thrust of that shining blade had a significance never dreamed of by the authors of the tactics.

And by long odds the finest sight at Leavenworth is the review of the entire command out at the West End. The valley of the Missouri lies open to the southward for miles beyond the shining roofs and spires of the town. The buildings of the post gleam on the grassy slopes to the eastward beyond the intervening tenements, and the horizon to the westward is hidden by the long line of picturesque and wooded heights, while the broad area of the drill-ground lies in the foreground, sloping gently away toward the town. Here, early in the summer morning, while the leaves are still dripping with dew and the grass is all a-sparkle, while the sun is still low in the eastern sky, and throwing long shadows over the valley, the whole command is ordered to assemble, and before their standards come in sight the shaded walks are thronged with ladies, and the piazzas of the West End are thrown hospitably open to all visitors, for, despite the early hour, all Leavenworth seems awake. Here and there in front of the quarters are mounted orderlies with the officers' horses, and man after man these dignitaries come forth from their domain plumed, gauntleted, booted, and spurred, swing into saddle, and trot away to join their commands in knightly fashion, while their comrades of the infantry elbow their way to their posts of duty through the groups upon the sidewalk.

The band, in its white plumes and facings, strides out through the dew to its place on the right of the coming line; then, far down the road toward the main garrison, the notes of a bugle are heard, and the eye roams over a long, moving lane of light and contrasting color. First comes the compact column of infantry, tramping sturdily toward us, and looking very soldierly in the spiked helmets and tasteful dark blue tunics. The silken banners wave over a small battalion, to be sure, but it is one that looks full of mettle, and is made up of chosen companies from different regiments. Behind them come the crimson guidon and waving plumes of the battery—horses, guns, wheels, linchpins and washers, buckles, straps, hames, bits, bossings, belts, and buttons, all glistening with the polish of skilful hands; and behind them all, the swallow-tailed pennons of scarlet and white, the standard of yellow silk, and the long column of yellow plumes reveal the battalion of cavalry. You cannot fail to note the erect, yet easy, confident pose of every officer and man as the riders go filing by. The dress and horse equipments of our mounted troops have little of the glitter and coquetry of the hussar or lancer of Europe; they are even sombre by comparison; but ours is eminently practical, and stands the test of the rough service of the frontier, which theirs would not; and as to the relative merits of the schools of horsemanship, there is little doubt that for "all-round" military work the American will outlast any of the foreign systems, and is far more soldierly and graceful in effect besides.

Troop after troop the cavalry jingle along, turning down to the left in rear of the forming line of footmen; and one troop—the standard troop—is made up entirely of colored men. The darkies ride quite as jauntily as their white comrades, and probably to the full as firmly and well; while in precision of movement and accuracy of alignment, "touch," and gait, there is more than one military spectator who seems to think their work superior to that of the rest of the battalion. An officer of the school explains this by

ON THE CAVALRY DRILL-GROUND.

saying: "The darky is always on dress parade. The moment he gets into uniform he thinks the eyes of all men are upon him, and he 'braces up,' and makes the most of his opportunity. Those other fellows, in 'I' and 'M' troops, for instance, are riding at ease. They will stiffen when they come into line."

One after another they move out upon the field, facing west, the infantry on the right and nearest us; then the battery, in two lines, its gun-carriages to the front; then the long single rank of the cavalry battalion, stretching to the far southern edge of the field. Well out to the west, in front of the centre, is the commanding officer with his staff, and presently, as the white-plumed adjutant gallops down the line, turns toward his chief on reaching the centre, then halts and reins about, there is a simultaneous crash as arms are presented, and a long line of steel—the sabres of the cavalry—springs into air. Then review order is taken, ranks are opened, the battery unlimbers and whirls its black-muzzled guns to the front; another present of the line to the exalted personage who receives the review, and is hailed with a flourish of trumpets and the simultaneous droop of all the standards; another movement, and the line becomes an open column; another command, and with a triumphant burst of music from the band the whole array moves as one man: the passage in review has begun. In quick time, the band leading, they come jauntily toward us, changing direction at the upper corner, and swinging past the animated groups of spectators. Front after front the sturdy infantry trudges by, the student officers hidden as file-closers behind their companies, and wishing, for this occasion only, that they belonged to the cavalry, and could command and be in front of their men instead of trailing meekly after them, as required of the infantry "sub." Well they know that they cannot by any human possibility look half so picturesque in this position as their rivals and contemporaries of the cavalry on their "prancing chargers" and in front of their platoons. All the same, they have their sympathetic admirers in the throng, and so they pass us by. And then, with champing bits and tossing manes, come the platoons of horse. The battery quickens its gait on the marching flanks, and the girls wonder how those gunners sit so straight with folded arms, and never make hysterical grabs at the bars or at each other, as they would do under like circumstances. The cavalry too come around at a trot, the young platoon commanders fully alive to and making the most of their golden opportunity, looking vastly martial, and striving *not* to look as though they very well knew just where "she" happened to stand among the groups of fair ones under the shade trees. Down the long field goes the glistening column, officer after officer saluting as he passes the reviewing point, and then the infantry reappears, tramping up the eastern edge. Like some perfected machine, the long array wheels into line to the left, the ranks are dressed, then brought once more to review order. Again the trumpets flourish, the standards droop, and arms clash to the present. Then comes brief rest before some one of the three commands is summoned to the front to show what it can do in the manœuvres of its particular arm. It may be a stirring skirmish drill, covering the entire valley, by the bright-plumed cavalry. It may be a dashing series of battery manœuvres, with much smoke, noise, and odor unlimited of "the villanous saltpetre." It may be rapid evolutions of the foot battalion; but in each and all the student officer must take his part.

Thus far it has been the policy of the school to educate its *élèves* to exercise command in any one of the three fighting arms of the service, and for some time officers of infantry drilled with the battery or the cavalry, and *vice versa;* but on parade the student officer appears with the company to which in his own arm he is assigned for duty during his two years' probation at Leavenworth. Just as at West Point some private of the graduating class has been called out of ranks and ordered to assume command of the battalion in presence of the Board of Visitors, so at Leavenworth the permanent officers are often withdrawn and their places taken by the students, one of whom serves as commander, another as adjutant, and half a dozen as captains. The cavalry battalion is put through its paces by a mixed assortment of subalterns of either white or yellow facings, and the infantry command is handled by a lot of young troopers. The theory is, of course, that the graduate of the School of Application should be as competent to instruct troops of any arm as is the graduate of

LIGHT BATTERY DRILL.

West Point, and certainly the former has far better opportunities for practice.

Just here it may as well be explained that while no reward, beyond the consciousness of duty well done, has thus far attached to conspicuous ability at the school, neither is there any serious consequence attendant upon failure. "All sails and no anchor," said Macaulay of our Constitution, and with better reason it may be said of the designers of the School of Application that they could prescribe anything and enforce nothing. A commission once gained in the line of the army is its possessor's for life or good behavior, and he may turn out to be a numskull without the faintest detriment to his prospects of promotion. At West Point the cadet who fails to pass a creditable examination every six months is discharged, and relegated to civil life. At Leavenworth, as at Fortress Monroe, the student could pitch his books into the fire, and face his examiners with the serene consciousness that, do their worst, they could only send him back to his regiment, where he perchance preferred to be. That in nine cases out of ten the detailed officers studied hard and did their best, whether they liked the course or not, was simply due to the high sense of professional pride and soldierly duty which is a characteristic of the army. It was more in grateful recognition of this spirit than with any idea of stimulating the few laggards to greater exertion that the staff of the school once hit upon a brilliant expedient for rewarding merit. Presumably it had the sanction of the War Department, although the astute officials of that establishment, versed as they are in the ways of Washington, must have smiled grimly when they gave it. In July, 1883, the staff published in orders its list of graduates, giving the relative merit and standing of each officer in the various studies of the two years' course, and concluded with the announcement of a selected class, who, having "shown aptitude for command and position in the staff departments, are recommended for professional employment." Ten were named as suitable aspirants for the Adjutant-General's Department, and when vacancies occurred in that plum orchard of the service, as vacancies did occur, it is possible that some of those designated youths found themselves wondering how much good that recommendation would do them. It is safe to say that, being young men of "level heads," no one of their number based much hope of preferment upon that imposing publication, and it goes without saying that the vacancies in the Adjutant-General's Department have continued to be filled without reference to the opinions of the School of Application.

All the same, the staff was right, and though the War Department itself has not been re-enforced from the school, certain regiments of the line and the Military Academy at West Point have drawn their adjutants from that list, to their very marked advantage.

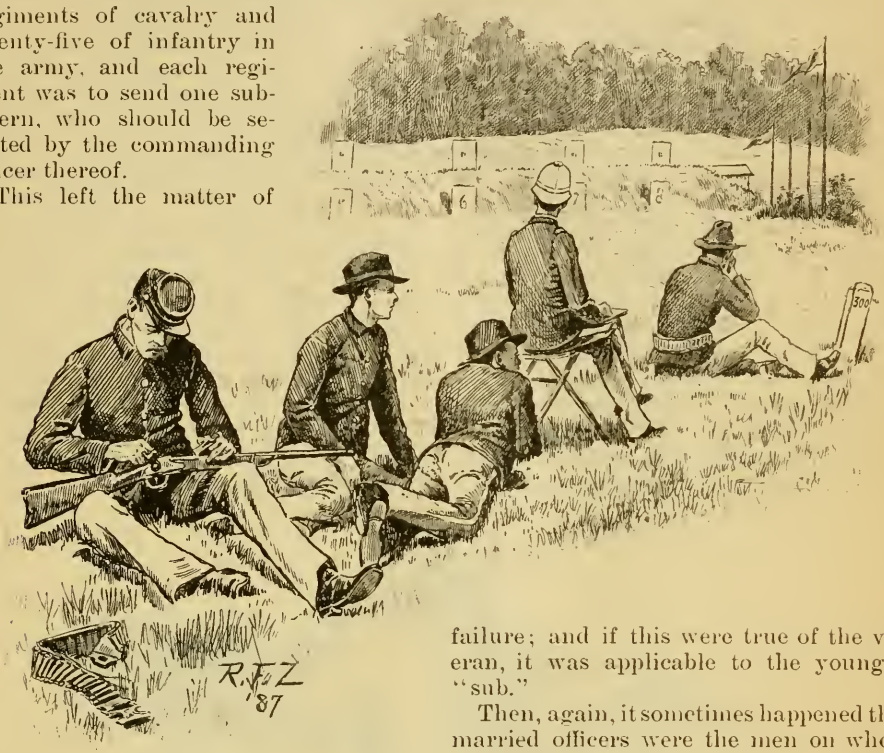
With a view to possible contingencies, twelve of the same class were named as suitable field officers of volunteers. More than one of the twelve had served with State troops during the war, and twenty years earlier that recommendation would have carried weight. What man can say how soon it may not be of value in the future?

And as the rewards of merit under a well-ordered republic are never such as to make a man the mark of envy, neither are its punishments of the awe-inspiring nature of those of the "effete monarchies." Allusion has been made to the fact that the worst that could be done to a student who would not study was to send him back to his regiment. Now it was the theory of the incorporators of the school that the officers ordered thither should be young men with pliant minds and a desire to learn. But, said the War Department, in formulating its order in the case, "The subjects for the school are the lieutenants belonging to the companies which compose the garrison and those specially detailed from the regiments." The garrison was announced to "habitually consist of three field officers of cavalry or infantry, with not less than four companies of infantry, four troops of cavalry, one light battery of artillery, and the officers attached for instruction."

This is practically the organization in effect to-day, although it is presumable that a separate school for the mounted service will soon be established at Fort Riley, where there is broader space for the evolutions of cavalry and light artillery. With this organization the start was made, and the system has not yet been altered in any important feature. So far as the lieutenants belonging to the garrison companies are concerned, there-

fore, there was no choice at all. They had to be students, no matter what their age, acquirements, or previous condition. Where the latitude came in was in the selection of those "specially detailed from the regiments." There are ten regiments of cavalry and twenty-five of infantry in the army, and each regiment was to send one subaltern, who should be selected by the commanding officer thereof.

This left the matter of



RIFLE PRACTICE.

"subjects" pretty largely to the inner consciousness of thirty-five different regimental commanders. "Many men have many minds," and very many different kinds of men were sent there as a result of placing in so many hands the determination of the kind of man that ought to be sent. Where one colonel would nominate a lieutenant because he wanted to go, another would be just as apt to pitch upon a fellow who had decided objections, thinking it might be wholesome discipline. Another would choose some young bookworm because school was his proper element; another some grizzled veteran—and we have many such—because it was presumably "the last chance he'd ever have of learning anything." There were not a few cases where the detail was most unwelcome, especially to the older men, and coupled with their sense of indignity was the conviction that there was no law which could either compel them to study or punish failure; and if this were true of the veteran, it was applicable to the youngest "sub."

Then, again, it sometimes happened that married officers were the men on whom the detail fell, and there were hardly "quarters" enough for the bachelors, let alone those blessed with wife and olive-branches, and all manner of makeshifts were the result.

But life at Leavenworth is blither, brighter, and gifted with greater zest than at many and many a post in our scattered army. To many of the students the course is attractive, and now that it has undergone sweeping revision, there is no man in the junior grades of the service whom it will not profit. The new programme is the evolution of much thought and experience, and the Board of Revision found little to add to or take away from the scheme as laid before them. In two years of study, with daily lectures, recitations, and practical experiments, the student is expected to complete a course of Military Art, including strategy, tactics, and study of campaigns and battles; law—military, constitutional, and interna-

tional; topography and surveying; field fortifications; signalling; cavalry—including field service, equitation, and hippology; infantry—camp and field service; artillery—with limited course in ordnance; and finally, military hygiene and "early aid to the wounded." It is a broad advance from the curriculum of the early days, and the "Kindergarten" is no more.

It is said that future classes will be made up of bachelors, and had this rule been in vogue before, even the abnormal precipitancy of the army lieutenant in matters matrimonial would have been stimulated. Now, however, it has become a post where our army ladies love to go, and nowhere does social life seem more pleasant. Famous were the Leavenworth theatricals for many a year, and beautiful are the evening "hops" and parties now. The "cares that infest the day" seem banished with the setting sun, and all the garrison, male and female, appears in force and finest feathers when the bugle sounds the signal for evening parade. This, the closing ceremony of the day, always takes place dismounted, and on the beautiful curving surface of the green in front of the commanding officer's. The long line stretches across from east to west, the yellow plumes of the cavalry looking like a hedge of golden-rod, and every young soldier at the school is there, while the paths and porches that surround are alive with dainty dresses and brightest color. The band plays its best, and when parade is finally dismissed, and the erect figures go stalking away through the trees, there is a brief quarter-hour of chat and interchange of greeting, and then the twilight deepens, and lights begin to twinkle here and there amid the vines, and the voices soften, and the clink of scabbard and beat of hoof of the cavalry patrol are heard across the broad parade, and little wisps of vapor begin to curl in the distant hollows, and blacker shadows to gather under the trees. The busy day is done, silence falls on the wide expanse of "guarded land," and then, far out on the slopes beyond, is heard the weird, wild plaint of the whippoorwill.

SWEET NELLY, MY HEART'S DELIGHT.

HE. SWEET Nelly, my heart's delight,
Be loving, and do not slight
The proffer I make
For modesty's sake.
I honor your beauty bright;
For love I profess,
I can do no less.
Thou hast my favor won;
And since I see
Your modesty,
I pray you agree,
And fancy me,
Though I'm but a farmer's son.

SHE. No; I am a lady gay;
It is very well known I may
Have men of renown
In country or town.
So, Roger, without delay
Court Bridget, or Sue,
Kate, Nancy, or Prue;
Their loves will soon be won;
But don't you dare
To speak me fair,
As if I were
At my last pray'r
To marry a farmer's son.

FROM THE RANKS.

A NOVEL.

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING,

AUTHOR OF

"THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "THE DESERTER," "MARION'S FAITH,"
"KITTY'S CONQUEST," ETC.

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FROM THE RANKS.

I.

A STRANGE thing had happened at the old fort during the still watches of the night. Even now, at nine in the morning, no one seemed to be in possession of the exact circumstances. The officer of the day was engaged in an investigation, and all that appeared to be generally known was the bald statement that the sentry on "Number Five" had fired at somebody or other about half after three; that he had fired by order of the officer of the day, who was on his post at the time; and that now he flatly refused to talk about the matter.

Garrison curiosity, it is perhaps needless to say, was rather stimulated than lulled by this announcement. An unusual number of officers were chatting about head-quarters when Colonel Maynard came over to his office. Several ladies, too, who had hitherto shown but languid interest in the morning music of the band, had taken the trouble to stroll down to the old quadrangle, ostensibly to see guard-mounting. Mrs. Maynard was almost always on her piazza at this time, and her lovely daughter was almost sure to be at the gate with two or three young fellows lounging about her. This morning, however, not a soul appeared in front of the colonel's quarters.

Guard-mounting at the fort was not held until nine o'clock, contrary to the somewhat general custom at other posts in our scattered army. Colonel Maynard had ideas of his own upon the subject, and it was his theory that everything worked more smoothly if he had finished a leisurely breakfast before beginning office-work of any kind, and neither the colonel nor his family cared to breakfast before eight o'clock. In view of the fact that Mrs. Maynard had borne that name but a very short time and that her knowledge of army life dated only from the month of May, the garrison was disposed to consider her en-

titled to much latitude of choice in such matters, even while it did say that she was old enough to be above bride-like sentiment. The women-folk at the fort were of opinion that Mrs. Maynard was fifty. It must be conceded that she was over forty, also that this was her second entry into the bonds of matrimony.

That no one should now appear on the colonel's piazza was obviously a disappointment to several people. In some way or other most of the breakfast-tables at the post had been enlivened by accounts of the mysterious shooting. The soldiers going the rounds with the "police-cart," the butcher and grocer and baker from town, the old milkwoman with her glistening cans, had all served as newsmongers from kitchen to kitchen, and the story that came in with the coffee to the lady of the house had lost nothing in bulk or bravery. The groups of officers chatting and smoking in front of head-quarters gained accessions every moment, while the ladies seemed more absorbed in chat and confidences than in the sweet music of the band.

What fairly exasperated some men was the fact that the old officer of the day was not out on the parade where he belonged. Only the new incumbent was standing there in statuesque pose as the band trooped along the line, and the fact that the colonel had sent out word that the ceremony would proceed without Captain Chester only served to add fuel to the flame of popular conjecture. It was known that the colonel was holding a consultation with closed doors with the old officer of the day, and never before since he came to the regiment had the colonel been known to look so pale and strange as when he glanced out for just one moment and called his orderly. The soldier sprang up, saluted, received his message, and, with every eye following him, sped off towards the old stone guard-house. In three minutes he was on his way back, accompanied by a corporal and private of the guard in full dress uniform.

"That's Leary,—the man who fired the shot," said Captain Wilton to his senior lieutenant, who stood by his side.

"Belongs to B Company, doesn't he?" queried the subaltern. "Seems to me I have heard Captain Armitage say he was one of his best men."

"Yes. He's been in the regiment as long as I can remember. What on earth can the colonel want him for? Near as I can learn, he only fired by Chester's order."

"And neither of them knows what he fired at."

It was perhaps ten minutes more before Private Leary came forth from the door-way of the colonel's office, nodded to the corporal, and, raising their white-gloved hands in salute to the group of officers, the two men tossed their rifles to the right shoulder and strode back to the guard.

Another moment, and the colonel himself opened his door and appeared in the hall-way. He stopped abruptly, turned back and spoke a few words in low tone, then hurried through the groups at the entrance, looking at no man, avoiding their glances, and giving faint and impatient return to the soldierly salutations that greeted him. The sweat was beaded on his forehead; his lips were white, and his face full

of a trouble and dismay no man had ever seen there before. He spoke to no one, but walked rapidly homeward, entered, and closed the gate and door behind him.

For a moment there was silence in the group. Few men in the service were better loved and honored than the veteran soldier who commanded the ——th Infantry; and it was with genuine concern that his officers saw him so deeply and painfully affected,—for affected he certainly was. Never before had his cheery voice denied them a cordial "Good-morning, gentlemen." Never before had his blue eyes flinched. He had been their comrade and commander in years of frontier service, and his bachelor home had been the rendezvous of all genial spirits when in garrison. They had missed him sorely when he went abroad on long leave the previous year, and were almost indignant when they received the news that he had met his fate in Italy and would return married. "She" was the widow of a wealthy New-Yorker who had been dead some three years only, and, though over forty, did not look her years to masculine eyes when she reached the fort in May. After knowing her a week, the garrison had decided to a man that the colonel had done wisely. Mrs. Maynard was charming, courteous, handsome, and accomplished. Only among the women were there still a few who resented their colonel's capture; and some of these, oblivious of the fact that they had tempted him with relations of their own, were sententious and severe in their condemnation of second marriage; for the colonel, too, was indulging in a second experiment. Of his first, only one man in the regiment, besides the commander, could tell anything; and he, to the just indignation of almost everybody, would not discuss the subject. It was rumored that in the old days when Maynard was senior captain and Chester junior subaltern in their former regiment the two had very little in common. It was known that the first Mrs. Maynard, while still young and beautiful, had died abroad. It was hinted that the resignation of a dashing lieutenant of the regiment, which was synchronous with her departure for foreign shores, was demanded by his brother officers; but it was useless asking Captain Chester. He could not tell; and—wasn't it odd?—here was Chester again, the only man in the colonel's confidence in an hour of evident trouble.

"By Jove! what's gone wrong with the chief?" was the first exclamation from one of the older officers. "I never saw him look so broken."

As no explanation suggested itself, they began edging in towards the office. The door stood open; a hand-bell banged; a clerk darted in from the sergeant-major's rooms, and Captain Chester was revealed seated at the colonel's desk. This in itself was sufficient to induce several officers to stroll in and look inquiringly around. Captain Chester, merely nodding, went on with some writing at which he was engaged.

After a moment's awkward silence and uneasy glancing at one another, the party seemed to arrive at the conclusion that it was time to speak. The band had ceased, and the new guard had marched away behind its pealing bugles. Lieutenant Hall winked at his comrades,

strolled hesitatingly over to the desk, balanced unsteadily on one leg, and, with his hands sticking in his trousers-pockets and his forage-cap swinging from protruding thumb and forefinger, cleared his throat, and, with marked lack of confidence, accosted his absorbed superior:

"Colonel gone home?"

"Didn't you see him?" was the uncompromising reply; and the captain did not deign to raise his head or eyes.

"Well—er—yes, I suppose I did," said Mr. Hall, shifting uncomfortably to his other leg, and prodding the floor with the toe of his boot.

"Then that wasn't what you wanted to know, I presume," said Captain Chester, signing his name with a vicious dab of the pen and bringing his fist down with a thump on the blotting-pad, while he wheeled around in his chair and looked squarely up into the perturbed features of the junior.

"No, it wasn't," answered Mr. Hall, in an injured tone, while an audible snicker at the door added to his sense of discomfort. "What I mainly wanted was to know could I go to town."

"That matter is easily arranged, Mr. Hall. All you have to do is to get out of that uncomfortable and unsoldierly position, stand in the attitude in which you are certainly more at home and infinitely more picturesque, proffer your request in respectful words, and there is no question as to the result."

"Oh! you're in command, then?" said Mr. Hall, slowly wriggling into the position of the soldier and flushing through his bronzed cheeks. "I thought the colonel might be only gone for a minute."

"The colonel may not be back for a week; but you be here for dress-parade all the same, and—— Mr. Hall!" he called, as the young officer was turning away. The latter faced about again.

"Was Mr. Jerrold going with you to town?"

"Yes, sir. He was to drive me in his dog-cart, and it's over here now."

"Mr. Jerrold cannot go,—at least not until I have seen him."

"Why, captain, he got the colonel's permission at breakfast this morning."

"That is true, no doubt, Mr. Hall." And the captain dropped his sharp and captious manner, and his voice fell, as though in sympathy with the cloud that settled on his face. "I cannot explain matters just now. There are reasons why the permission is withdrawn for the time being. The adjutant will notify him." And Captain Chester turned to his desk again as the new officer of the day, guard-book in hand, entered to make his report.

"The usual orders, captain," said Chester, as he took the book from his hand and looked over the list of prisoners. Then, in bold and rapid strokes, he wrote across the page the customary certificate of the old officer of the day, winding up with this remark:

"He also inspected guard and visited sentries between 3 and 3.35 A.M. The firing at 3.30 A.M. was by his order."

Meantime, those officers who had entered and who had no immediate duty to perform were standing or seated around the room, but all ob-

serving profound silence. For a moment or two no sound was heard but the scratching of the captain's pen. Then, with some embarrassment and hesitancy, he laid it down and glanced around him.

"Has any one here anything to ask,—any business to transact?"

Two or three mentioned some routine matters that required the action of the post-commander, but did so reluctantly, as though they preferred to await the orders of the colonel himself. Captain Wilton, indeed, spoke his sentiments:

"I wanted to see Colonel Maynard about getting two men of my company relieved from extra duty; but, as he isn't here, I fancy I had better wait."

"Not at all. Who are your men?—Have it done at once, Mr. Adjutant, and supply their places from my company, if need be. Now is there anything else?"

The group was apparently "nonplussed," as the adjutant afterwards put it, by such unlooked-for complaisance on the part of the usually crotchety senior captain. Still, no one offered to lead the others and leave the room. After a moment's nervous rapping with his knuckles on the desk, Captain Chester again abruptly spoke:

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to incommode you, but, if there be nothing more that you desire to see me about, I shall go on with some other matters, which—pardon me—do not require your presence."

At this very broad hint the party slowly found their legs, and with much wonderment and not a few resentful glances at their temporary commander the officers sauntered to the door-way. There, however, several stopped again, still reluctant to leave in the face of so pervading a mystery, for Wilton turned.

"Am I to understand that Colonel Maynard has left the post to be gone any length of time?" he asked.

"He has not yet gone. I do not know how long he will be gone or how soon he will start. For pressing personal reasons he has turned over the command to me; and, if he decide to remain away, of course some field-officer will be ordered to come to head-quarters. For a day or two you will have to worry along with me; but I shan't worry you more than I can help. I've got mystery and mischief enough here to keep me busy, God knows. Just ask Sloat to come back here to me, will you? And—Wilton, I did not mean to be abrupt with you. I'm all upset to-day. Mr. Adjutant, notify Mr. Jerrold at once that he must not leave the post until I have seen him. It is the colonel's last order. Tell him so."

II.

The night before had been unusually dark. A thick veil of clouds overspread the heavens and hid the stars. Moon there was none, for the faint silver crescent that gleamed for a moment through the swift-sailing wisps of vapor had dropped beneath the horizon soon after tattoo, and the mournful strains of "taps," borne on the rising wind, seemed to signal "extinguish lights" to the entire firmament as well as to Fort Sibley. There was a dance of some kind at the quarters of one of the staff-officers living far up the row on the southern terrace.

Chester heard the laughter and chat as the young officers and their convoy of matrons and maids came tripping homeward after midnight. He was a crusty old bachelor, to use his own description, and rarely ventured into these scenes of social gayety, and, besides, he was officer of the day, and it was a theory he was fond of expounding to juniors that when on guard no soldier should permit himself to be drawn from the scene of his duties. With his books and his pipe Chester whiled away the lonely hours of the early night, and wondered if the wind would blow up a rain or disperse the clouds entirely. Towards one o'clock a light, bounding footstep approached his door, and the portal flew open as a trim-built young fellow with laughing eyes and an air of exuberant health and spirits came briskly in. It was Rollins, the junior second lieutenant of the regiment, and Chester's own and only pet,—so said the envious others. He was barely a year out of leading-strings at the Point, and as full of hope and pluck and mischief as a colt. Moreover, he was frank and teachable, said Chester, and didn't come to him with the idea that he had nothing to learn and less to do. The boy won upon his gruff captain from the very start, and, to the incredulous delight of the whole regiment, within six months the old cynic had taken him into his heart and home, and Mr. Rollins occupied a pleasant room under Chester's roof-tree, and was the sole accredited sharer of the captain's mess. To a youngster just entering service, whose ambition it was to stick to business and make a record for zeal and efficiency, these were manifest advantages. There were men in the regiment to whom such close communion with a watchful senior would have been most embarrassing, and Mr. Rollins's predecessor as second lieutenant of Chester's company was one of these. Mr. Jerrold was a happy man when promotion took him from under the wing of "Crusty Jake" and landed him in Company B. More than that, it came just at a time when, after four years of loneliness and isolation at an up-river stockade, his new company and his old one, together with four others from the regiment, were ordered to join head-quarters and the band at the most delightful station in the Northwest. Here Mr. Rollins had reported for duty during the previous autumn, and here they were with troops of other arms of the service, enjoying the close proximity of all the good things of civilization.

Chester looked up with a quizzical smile as his "plebe" came in:

"Well, sir, how many dances had you with 'Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt'? Not many, I fancy, with Mr. Jerrold monopolizing everything, as usual. By gad! some good fellow could make a colossal fortune in buying that young man at my valuation and selling him at his own."

"Oh, come, now, captain," laughed Rollins, "Jerrold's no such slouch as you make him out. He's lazy, and he likes to spoon, and he puts up with a good deal of petting from the girls,—who wouldn't, if he could get it?—but he is jolly and big-hearted, and don't put on any airs,—with us, at least,—and the mess like him first-rate. 'Tain't his fault that he's handsome and a regular lady-killer. You must admit that he had a pretty tough four years of it up there at that cussed old Indian graveyard, and it's only natural he should enjoy getting

here, where there are theatres and concerts and operas and dances and dinners——"

"Yes, dances and dinners and daughters,—all delightful, I know, but no excuse for a man's neglecting his manifest duty, as he is doing and has been ever since we got here. Any other time the colonel would have straightened him out; but no use trying it now, when both women in his household are as big fools about the man as anybody in town,—bigger, unless I'm a born idiot." And Chester rose excitedly.

"I suppose he had Miss Renwick pretty much to himself to-night?" he presently demanded, looking angrily and searchingly at his junior, as though half expecting him to dodge the question.

"Oh, yes. Why not? It's pretty evident she would rather dance and be with him than with any one else: so what can a fellow do? Of course we ask her to dance, and all that, and I think he wants us to; but I cannot help feeling rather a bore to her, even if she *is* only eighteen, and there are plenty of pleasant girls in the garrison who don't get any too much attention, now we're so near a big city, and I like to be with them."

"Yes, and it's the *right* thing for you to do, youngster. That's one trait I despise in Jerrold. When we were up there at the stockade two winters ago, and Captain Gray's little girl was there, he hung around her from morning till night, and the poor little thing fairly beamed and blossomed with delight. Look at her now, man! He don't go near her. He hasn't had the decency to take her a walk, a drive, or anything, since we got here. He began, from the moment we came, with that gang in town. He was simply devoted to Miss Beaubien until Alice Renwick came; then he dropped her like a hot brick. By the Eternal, Rollins, he hasn't gotten off with *that* old love yet, you mark my words. There's Indian blood in her veins, and a look in her eye that makes me wriggle, sometimes. I watched her last night at parade when she drove out here with that copper-faced old squaw, her mother. For all her French and Italian education and her years in New York and Paris, that girl's got a wild streak in her somewhere. She sat there watching him as the officers marched to the front, and then *her*, as he went up and joined Miss Renwick; and there was a gleam of her white teeth and a flash in her black eyes that made me think of the leap of a knife from the sheath. Not but what 'twould serve him right if she did play him some devil's trick. It's his own doing. Were any people out from town?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes, half a dozen or so," answered Mr. Rollins, who was pulling off his boots and inserting his feet into easy slippers, while old "Crusty" tramped excitedly up and down the floor. "Most of them stayed out here, I think. Only one team went back across the bridge."

"Whose was that?"

"The Suttons', I believe. Young Cub Sutton was out with his sister and another girl."

"There's another damned fool!" growled Chester. "That boy has ten thousand a year of his own, a beautiful home that will be his, a doting mother and sister, and everything wealth can buy, and yet, by gad! he's unhappy because he can't be a poor devil of a lieutenant,

with nothing but drills, debts, and rifle-practice to enliven him. That's what brings him out here all the time. He'd swap places with you in a minute. Isn't he very thick with Jerrold?"

"Oh, yes, rather. Jerrold entertains him a good deal."

"Which is returned with compound interest, I'll bet you. Mr. Jerrold simply makes a convenience of him. He won't make love to his sister, because the poor, rich, unsophisticated girl is as ugly as she is ubiquitous. His majesty is fastidious, you see, and seeks only the caress of beauty, and while he lives there at the Suttons' when he goes to town, and dines and sleeps and smokes and wines there, and uses their box at the opera-house, and is courted and flattered by the old lady because dear Cubby worships the ground he walks on and poor Fanny Sutton thinks him adorable, he turns his back on the girl at every dance because she *can't* dance, and leaves her to you fellows who have a conscience and some idea of decency. He gives all *his* devotions to Nina Beaubien, who dances like a *coryphée*, and drops *her* when Alice Renwick comes with her glowing Spanish beauty. Oh, damn it, I'm an old fool to get worked up over it as I do, but you young fellows don't see what I see. You haven't seen what I've seen; and pray God you never may! That's where the shoe pinches, Rollins. It is what he *reminds* me of—not so much what he *is*, I suppose—that I get rabid about. He is for all the world like a man we had in the old regiment when you were in swaddling-clothes; and I never look at Mamie Gray's sad, white face that it doesn't bring back a girl I knew just then whose heart was broken by just such a shallow, selfish, adorable scoun—— No, I won't use *that* word in speaking of Jerrold; but it's what I fear. Rollins, you call him generous. Well, so he is,—*lavish*, if you like, with his money and his hospitality here in the post. Money comes easily to him, and goes; but you boys misuse the term. *I* call him selfish to the core, because he can deny himself no luxury, no pleasure, though it may wring a woman's life—or, more than that, her honor—to give it him." The captain was tramping up and down the room now, as was his wont when excited; his face was flushed, and his hand clinched. He turned suddenly and faced the younger officer, who sat gazing uncomfortably at the rug in front of the fireplace:

"Rollins, some day I may tell you a story that I've kept to myself all these years. You won't wonder at my feeling as I do about these goings-on of your friend Jerrold when you hear it all, but it was just such a man as he who ruined one woman, broke the heart of another, and took the sunshine out of the life of two men from that day to this. One of them was your colonel, the other your captain. Now go to bed. I'm going out." And, throwing down his pipe, regardless of the scattering sparks and ashes, Captain Chester strode into the hall-way, picked up the first forage-cap he laid hands on, and banged himself out of the front door.

Mr. Rollins remained for some moments in the same attitude, still gazing abstractedly at the rug, and listening to the nervous tramp of his senior officer on the piazza without. Then he slowly and thoughtfully went to his room, where his perturbed spirit was soon soothed in

sleep. His conscience being clear and his health perfect, there were no deep cares to keep him tossing on a restless pillow.

To Chester, however, sleep was impossible: he tramped the piazza a full hour before he felt placid enough to go and inspect his guard. The sentries were calling three o'clock, and the wind had died away, as he started on his round. Dark as was the night, he carried no lantern. The main garrison was well lighted by lamps, and the road circling the old fort was broad, smooth, and bordered by a stone coping wall where it skirted the precipitous descent into the river-bottom. As he passed down the plank walk west of the quadrangle wherein lay the old barracks and the stone quarters of the commanding officer and the low one-storied row of bachelor dens, he could not help noting the silence and peace of the night. Not a light was visible at any window as he strode down the line. The challenge of the sentry at the old stone tower sounded unnecessarily sharp and loud, and his response of "Officer of the day" was lower than usual, as though rebuking the unseemly outcry. The guard came scrambling out and formed hurriedly to receive him, but the captain's inspection was of the briefest kind. Barely glancing along the prison corridor to see that the bars were in place, he turned back into the night, and made for the line of posts along the river-bank. The sentry at the high bridge across the gorge, and the next one, well around to the southeast flank, were successively visited and briefly questioned as to their instructions, and then the captain plodded sturdily on until he came to the sharp bend around the outermost angle of the fort and found himself passing behind the quarters of the commanding officer, a substantial two-storied stone house with mansard roof and dormer-windows. The road in the rear was some ten feet below the level of the parade inside the quadrangle, and consequently, as the house faced the parade, what was the ground-floor from that front became the second story at the rear. The kitchen, storeroom, and servants' rooms were on this lower stage, and opened upon the road; an outer stairway ran up to the centre door at the back, but at the east and west flanks of the house the stone walls stood without port or window except those above the eaves,—the dormers. Light and air in abundance streamed through the broad Venetian windows north and south when light and air were needed. This night, as usual, all was tightly closed below, all darkness aloft as he glanced up at the dormers high above his head. As he did so, his foot struck a sudden and sturdy obstacle; he stumbled and pitched heavily forward, and found himself sprawling at full length upon a ladder lying on the ground almost in the middle of the roadway.

"Damn those painters!" he growled between his set teeth. "They leave their infernal man-traps around in the very hope of catching me, I believe. Now, who but a painter would have left a ladder in such a place as this?"

Rising ruefully and rubbing a bruised knee with his hand, he limped painfully ahead a few steps, until he came to the side-wall of the colonel's house. Here a plank walk passed from the roadway along the western wall until almost on a line with the front piazza, where by a flight of steps it was carried up to the level of the parade. Here he

paused a moment to dust off his clothes and rearrange his belt and sword. He stood leaning against the wall and facing the gray stone gable end of the row of old-fashioned quarters that bounded the parade upon the southwest. All was still darkness and silence.

"Confound this sword!" he muttered again: "the thing made rattle and racket enough to wake the dead. Wonder if I disturbed anybody at the colonel's."

As though in answer to his suggestion, there suddenly appeared, high on the blank wall before him, the reflection of a faint light. Had a little night-lamp been turned on in the front room of the upper story? The gleam came from the north window on the side: he saw plainly the shadow of the pretty lace curtains, looped loosely back. Then the shade was gently raised, and there was for an instant the silhouette of a slender hand and wrist, the shadow of a lace-bordered sleeve. Then the light receded, as though carried back across the room, waned, as though slowly extinguished, and the last shadows showed the curtains still looped back, the rolling shade still raised.

"I thought so," he growled. "One tumble like that is enough to wake the Seven Sleepers, let alone a love-sick girl who is probably dreaming over Jerrold's parting words. She is spirited and blue-blooded enough to have more sense, too, that same superb brunette. Ah, Miss Alice, I wonder if you think that fellow's love worth having. It is two hours since he left you,—more than that,—and here you are awake yet,—cannot sleep,—want more air, and have to come and raise your shade. No such warm night, either." These were his reflections as he picked up his offending sword and, more slowly and cautiously now, groped his way along the western terrace. He passed the row of bachelor quarters, and was well out beyond the limits of the fort before he came upon the next sentry,—"Number Five,"—and recognized, in the stern "Who comes there?" and the sharp rattle of the bayonet as it dropped to the charge, the well-known challenge of Private Leary, one of the oldest and most reliable soldiers in the regiment.

"All right on your post, Leary?" he asked, after having given the countersign.

"All right, I *think*, sor; though if the captain had asked me that half an hour ago I'd not have said so. It was so dark I couldn't see me hand afore me face, sor; but about half-past two I was walkin' very slow down back of the quarters, whin just close by Loot'nant Jerrold's back gate I seen somethin' movin', and as I come softly along it riz up, an' sure I thought 'twas the loot'nant himself, whin he seemed to catch sight o' me or hear me, and he backed inside the gate an' shut it. I was sure 'twas he, he was so tall and slim like, an' so I niver said a word until I got to thinkin' over it, and then I couldn't spake. Sure if it had been the loot'nant he wouldn't have backed away from a sintry; he'd 'a' come out bold and given the countersign; but I didn't think o' that. It looked like him in the dark, an' 'twas his quarters, an' I thought it *was* him, until I thought ag'in, and then, sor, I wint back and searched the yard; but there was no one there."

"Hm! Odd thing that, Leary! Why didn't you challenge at first?"

"Sure, sor, he lept inside the fince quick as iver we set eyes on each other. He was bendin' down, and I thought it was one of the hound pups when I first sighted him."

"And he hasn't been around since?"

"No, sor, nor nobody, till the officer of the day came along."

Chester walked away puzzled. Sibley was a most quiet and orderly garrison. Night prowlers had never been heard from, especially over here at the south and southwest fronts. The enlisted men going to or from town passed across the big, high bridge or went at once to their own quarters on the east and north. This southwestern terrace behind the bachelors' row was the most secluded spot on the whole post,—so much so that when a fire broke out there among the fuel-heaps one sharp winter's night a year agone it had wellnigh enveloped the whole line before its existence was discovered. Indeed, not until after this occurrence was a sentry posted on that front at all; and, once ordered there, he had so little to do and was so comparatively sure to be undisturbed that the old soldiers eagerly sought the post in preference to any other, and were given it as a peace privilege. For months, relief after relief tramped around the fort and found the terrace post as humdrum and silent as an empty church; but this night "Number Five" leaped suddenly into notoriety.

Instead of going home, Chester kept on across the plateau and took a long walk on the northern side of the reservation, where the quartermaster's stables and corrals were placed. He was affected by a strange unrest. His talk with Rollins had roused the memories of years long gone by,—of days when he, too, was young and full of hope and faith, ay, full of love,—all lavished on one fair girl who knew it well, but gently, almost entreatingly, repelled him. Her heart was wrapped up in another, the Adonis of his day in the gay old seaboard garrison. She was a soldier's child, barrack-born, simply taught, knowing little of the vice and temptations, the follies and the frauds, of the whirling life of civilization. A good and gentle mother had reared her and been called hence. Her father, an officer whose sabre-arm was left at Molino del Rey, and whose heart was crushed when the loving wife was taken from him, turned to the child who so resembled her, and centred there all his remaining love and life. He welcomed Chester to his home, and tacitly favored his suit, but in his blindness never saw how a few moonlit strolls on the old moss-grown parapet, a few evening dances in the casemates with handsome, wooing, winning Will Forrester, had done their work. She gave him all the wild, enthusiastic, worshipping love of her girlish heart just about the time Captain and Mrs. Maynard came back from leave, and then he grew cold and negligent *there*, but lived at Maynard's fireside; and one day there came a sensation,—a tragedy,—and Mrs. Maynard went away, and died abroad, and a shocked and broken-hearted girl hid her face from all and pined at home, and Mr. Forrester's resignation was sent from—no one knew just where, and no one would have cared to know, except Maynard. He would have followed him, pistol in hand, but Forrester gave him no chance. Years afterwards Chester again sought her and offered her his love and his name. It was useless, she told him, sadly. She lived

only for her father now, and would never leave him till he died, and then—she prayed she might go too. Memories like this *will* come up at such times in these same "still watches of the night." Chester was in a moody frame of mind when about half an hour later he came back past the guard-house. The sergeant was standing near the lighted entrance, and the captain called him:

"There's a ladder lying back of the colonel's quarters on the roadway. Some of those painters left it, I suppose. It's a wonder some of the reliefs have not broken their necks over it going around to-night. Let the next one pick it up and move it out of the way. Hasn't it been reported?"

"Not to me, sir. Corporal Schreiber has command of this relief, and he has said nothing about it. Here he is, sir."

"Didn't you see it or stumble over it when posting your relief, corporal?" asked Chester.

"No indeed, sir. I—I think the captain must have been mistaken in thinking it a ladder. We would surely have struck it if it had been."

"No mistake at all, corporal. I lifted it. It is a long, heavy ladder,—over twenty feet, I should say."

"There *is* such a ladder back there, captain," said the sergeant, "but it always hangs on the fence just behind the young officers' quarters,—Bachelors' Row, sir, I mean."

"And that ladder was there an hour ago when I went my rounds," said the corporal, earnestly. "I had my hurricane-lamp, sir, and saw it on the fence plainly. And there was nothing behind the colonel's at that hour."

Chester turned away, thoughtful and silent. Without a word he walked straight into the quadrangle, past the low line of stone buildings, the offices of the adjutant and quartermaster, the home of the sergeant-major, the club- and billiard-room, past the long, piazza-shaded row of bachelor quarters, and came upon the plank walk at the corner of the colonel's fence. Ten more steps, and he stood stock-still at the head of the flight of wooden stairs.

There, dimly visible against the southern sky, its base on the plank walk below him, its top resting upon the eaves midway between the dormer-window and the roof of the piazza, so that one could step easily from it into the one or on to the other, was the very ladder that half an hour before was lying on the ground behind the house.

His heart stood still. He seemed powerless to move,—even to think. Then a slight noise roused him, and with every nerve tingling he crouched ready for a spring. With quick, agile movements, noiseless as a cat, sinuous and stealthy as a serpent, the dark figure of a man issued from Alice Renwick's chamber window and came gliding down.

One second more, and, almost as noiselessly, he reached the ground, then quickly raised and turned the ladder, stepped with it to the edge of the roadway, and peered around the angle as though to see that no sentry was in sight, then vanished with his burden around the corner. Another second, and down the steps went Chester, three at a bound, tiptoeing it in pursuit. Ten seconds brought him close to the culprit,—a tall, slender shadow.

"You villain! Halt!"

Down went the ladder on the dusty road. The hand that Chester had clinched upon the broad shoulder was hurled aside. There was a sudden whirl, a lightning blow that took the captain full in the chest and staggered him back upon the treacherous and entangling rungs, and, ere he could recover himself, the noiseless stranger had fairly whizzed into space and vanished in the darkness up the road. Chester sprang in pursuit. He heard the startled challenge of the sentry, and then Leary's excited "Halt, I say! Halt!" and then he shouted,—

"Fire on him, Leary! Bring him down!"

Bang went the ready rifle with sharp, sullen roar that woke the echoes across the valley. Bang again, as Leary sent a second shot after the first. Then, as the captain came panting to the spot, they followed up the road. No sign of the runner. Attracted by the shots, the sergeant of the guard and one or two men, lantern-bearing, came running to the scene. Excitedly they searched up and down the road in mingled hope and dread of finding the body of the marauder, or some clue or trace. Nothing! Whoever he was, the fleet runner had vanished and made good his escape.

"Who could it have been, sir?" asked the sergeant of the officer of the day. "Surely none of the men ever come round this way."

"I don't know, sergeant; I don't know. Just take your lamp and see if there is anything visible down there among the rocks. He may have been hit and leaped the wall.—Do you think you hit him, Leary?"

"I can't say, sor. He came by me like a flash. I had just a second's look at him, and——Sure I niver saw such runnin'."

"Could you see his face?" asked Chester, in a low tone, as the other men moved away to search the rocks.

"Not his face, sor. 'Twas too dark."

"Was there—did he look like anybody you knew, or had seen?—anybody in the command?"

"Well, sor, not among the men, that is. There's none so tall and slim both, and so light. Sure he must 'a' worn gums, sor. You couldn't hear the whisper of a footfall."

"But whom did he *seem* to resemble?"

"Well, if the captain will forgive me, sor, it's unwillin' I am to say the worrd, but there's no one that tall and light and slim here, sor, but Loot'nant Jerrold. Sure it couldn't be him, sor."

"Leary, will you promise me something on your word as a man?"

"I will, sor."

"Say not one word of this matter to any one, except I tell you, or you have to, before a court."

"I promise, sor."

"And I believe you. Tell the sergeant I will soon be back."

With that he turned and walked down the road until once more he came to the plank crossing and the passage-way between the colonel's and Bachelors' Row. Here again he stopped short, and waited with bated breath and scarcely-beating heart. The faint light he had seen before again illumined the room and cast its gleam upon the old gray

wall. Even as he gazed, there came silently to the window a tall, white-robed form, and a slender white hand seized and lowered the shade, noiselessly. Then, as before, the light faded away; but—she was awake.

Waiting one moment in silence, Captain Chester then sprang up the wooden steps and passed under the piazza which ran the length of the bachelor quarters. Half-way down the row he turned sharply to his left, opened the green-painted door, and stood in a little dark hall-way. Taking his match-box from his pocket, he struck a light, and by its glare quickly read the card upon the first door-way to his right:

"Mr. Howard F. Jerrold,
"——*th Infantry, U.S.A.*"

Opening this door, he bolted straight through the little parlor to the bedroom in the rear. A dim light was burning on the mantel. The bed was unruffled, untouched, and Mr. Jerrold was not there.

Five minutes afterwards, Captain Chester, all alone, had laboriously and cautiously dragged the ladder from the side to the rear of the colonel's house, stretched it in the roadway where he had first stumbled upon it, then returned to the searching-party on "Number Five."

"Send two men to put that ladder back," he ordered. "It is where I told you,—on the road behind the colonel's."

III.

When Mrs. Maynard came to Sibley in May and the officers with their wives were making their welcoming call, she had with motherly pride and pleasure yielded to their constant importunities and shown to one party after another an album of photographs,—likenesses of her only daughter. There were little *cartes de visite* representing her in long dresses and baby-caps; quaint little pictures of a chubby-faced, chubby-legged infant a few months older; charming studies of a little girl with great black eyes and delicate features; then of a tall, slender slip of a maiden, decidedly foreign-looking; then of a sweet and pensive face, with great dark eyes, long, beautiful curling lashes, and very heavy, low-arched brows, exquisitely moulded mouth and chin, and most luxuriant dark hair; then others, still older, in every variety of dress,—even in fancy costume, such as the girl had worn at fair or masquerade. These and others still had Mrs. Maynard shown them, with repressed pride and pleasure and with sweet acknowledgment of their enthusiastic praises. Alice still tarried in the East, visiting relatives whom she had not seen since her father's death three years earlier, and, long before she came to join her mother at Sibley and to enter upon the life she so eagerly looked forward to, "'way out in the West, you know, with officers and soldiers and the band, and buffalo and Indians all around you," there was not an officer or an officer's wife who had not delightedly examined that album. There was still another picture, but that one had been shown to only a chosen few just one week after her daughter's arrival, and rather an absurd scene had occurred, in which that

most estimable officer, Lieutenant Sloat, had figured as the hero. A more simple-minded, well-intentioned fellow than Sloat there did not live. He was so full of kindness and good nature and readiness to do anything for anybody that it never seemed to occur to him that everybody on earth was not just as ready to be equally accommodating. He was a perpetual source of delight to the colonel, and one of the most loyal and devoted of subalterns, despite the fact that his locks were long silvered with the frosts of years and that he had fought through the war of the rebellion and risen to the rank of a field-officer in Maynard's old brigade. The most temperate of men, ordinarily, the colonel had one anniversary he loved to celebrate, and Sloat was his stand-by when the 3d of July came round, just as he had been at his shoulder at that supreme moment when, heedless of the fearful sweep of shell and canister through their shattered ranks, Pickett's heroic Virginians breasted the slope of Cemetery Hill and surged over the low stone wall into Cushing's guns. Hard, stubborn fighting had Maynard's men to do that day, and for serene courage and determination no man had beaten Sloat. Both officers had bullet-hole mementos to carry from that field; both had won their brevets for conspicuous gallantry, and Sloat was a happy and grateful man when, years afterwards, his old commander secured him a lieutenancy in the regular service. He was the colonel's henchman, although he never had brains enough to win a place on the regimental staff, and when Mrs. Maynard came he overwhelmed her with cumbrous compliments and incessant calls. He was, to his confident belief, her chosen and accepted knight for full two days after her arrival. Then Jerrold came back from a brief absence, and, as in duty bound, went to pay his respects to his colonel's wife; and that night there had been a singular scene. Mrs. Maynard had stopped suddenly in her laughing chat with two ladies, had started from her seat, wildly staring at the tall, slender subaltern who entered the gateway, and then fell back in her chair, fairly swooning as he made his bow.

Sloat had rushed into the house to call the colonel and get some water, while Mr. Jerrold stood paralyzed at so strange a reception of his first call. Mrs. Maynard revived presently, explained that it was her heart, or the heat, or something, and the ladies on their way home decided that it was possibly the heart, it was certainly not the heat, it was unquestionably something, and that something was Mr. Jerrold, for she never took her eyes off him during the entire evening, and seemed unable to shake off the fascination. Next day Jerrold dined there, and from that time on he was a daily visitor. Every one noted Mrs. Maynard's strong interest in him, but no one could account for it. She was old enough to be his mother, said the garrison; but not until Alice Renwick came did another consideration appear: he was singularly like the daughter. Both were tall, lithe, slender; both had dark, lustrous eyes, dark, though almost perfect, skin, exquisitely-chiselled features, and slender, shapely hands and feet. Alice was "the picture of her father," said Mrs. Maynard, and Mr. Renwick had lived all his life in New York; while Mr. Jerrold was of an old Southern family, and his mother a Cuban beauty who was the toast of the New Orleans clubs not many years before the war.

Poor Sloat! He did not fancy Jerrold, and was as jealous as so unselfish a mortal could be of the immediate ascendency the young fellow established in the colonel's household. It was bad enough before Alice joined them; after that it was wellnigh unbearable. Then came the 3d-of-July dinner and the colonel's one annual jollification. No man ever heard of Sloat's being intoxicated; he rarely drank at all; but this evening the reminiscences of the day, the generous wine, the unaccustomed elegance of all his surroundings, due to Mrs. Maynard's taste and supervision, and the influence of Alice Renwick's exquisite beauty, had fairly carried him away.

They were chatting in the parlor, while Miss Renwick was entertaining some young-lady friends from town and listening to the band on the parade. Sloat was expatiating on her grace and beauty and going over the album for the twentieth time, when the colonel, with a twinkling eye, remarked to Mrs. Maynard,—

"I think you ought to show Major* Sloat the 'Directoire' picture, my dear."

"Alice would never forgive me," said madame, laughing; "though I consider it the most beautiful we have of her."

"Oh, where is it?" "Oh, do let us see it, Mrs. Maynard!" was the chorus of exclamations from the few ladies present. "Oh, I *insist* on seeing it, madame," was Sloat's characteristic contribution to the clamor.

"I want you to understand it," said Mrs. Maynard, pleased, but still hesitating. "We are very daft about Alice at home, you know, and it's quite a wonder she has not been utterly spoiled by her aunts and uncles; but this picture was a specialty. An artist friend of ours fairly *made* us have it taken in the wedding-dress worn by her grandmother. You know the Josephine Beauharnais 'Directoire' style that was worn in seventeen ninety-something. Her neck and shoulders are lovely, and that was why we consented. I went, and so did the artist, and we posed her, and the photograph is simply perfect of her face, and neck too, but when Alice saw it she blushed furiously and forbade my having them finished. Afterwards, though, she yielded when her aunt Kate and I begged so hard and promised that none should be given away, and so just half a dozen were finished. Indeed, the dress is by no means as *décolleté* as many girls wear theirs at dinner now in New York; but poor Alice was scandalized when she saw it last month, and she never would let me put one in the album."

"Oh, *do* go and get it, Mrs. Maynard!" pleaded the ladies. "Oh, *please* let me see it, Mrs. Maynard!" added Sloat; and at last the mother-pride prevailed. Mrs. Maynard rustled up-stairs, and presently returned holding in her hands a delicate silver frame in filigree-work, a quaint foreign affair, and enclosed therein was a cabinet photograph *en vignette*,—the head, neck, and shoulders of a beautiful girl; and the dainty, diminutive, what-there-was-of-it waist of the old-fashioned gown,

* By act of Congress, officers may be addressed by the title of the highest rank held by them in the volunteer service during the war. The colonel always punctiliously so addressed his friend and subordinate, although in the army his grade was simply that of first lieutenant.

sashed almost immediately under the exquisite bust, revealed quite materially the cause of Alice Renwick's blushes. But a more beautiful portrait was never photographed. The women fairly gasped with delight and envy. Sloat could not restrain his impatience to get it in his own hands, and finally he grasped it and then eyed it in rapture. It was two minutes before he spoke a word, while the colonel sat laughing at his worshipping gaze. Mrs. Maynard somewhat uneasily stretched forth her hand, and the other ladies impatiently strove to regain possession.

"Come, Major Sloat, you've surely had it long enough. *We* want it again."

"Never!" said Sloat, with melodramatic intensity. "Never! This is my ideal of perfection,—of divinity in woman. I will bear it home with me, set it above my fireside, and adore it day and night."

"Nonsense, Major Sloat!" said Mrs. Maynard, laughing, yet far from being at her ease. "Come, I *must* take it back. Alice may be in any minute now, and if she knew I had betrayed her she would never forgive me. Come, surrender!" And she strove to take it from him.

But Sloat was in one of his utterly asinine moods. He would have been perfectly willing to give any sum he possessed for so perfect a picture as this. He never dreamed that there were good and sufficient reasons why *no* man should have it. He so loved and honored his colonel that he was ready to lay down his life for any of his household. In laying claim to this picture he honestly believed that it was the highest proof he could give of his admiration and devotion. A tame surrender now meant that his protestations were empty words. "Therefore," argued Sloat, "I must stand firm."

"Madame," said he, "I'd die first." And with that he began backing to the door.

Alarmed now, Mrs. Maynard sprang after him, and the little major leaped upon a chair, his face aglow, jolly, rubicund, beaming with bliss and triumph. She looked up, almost wringing her hands, and turned half appealingly to the colonel, who was laughing heartily on the sofa, never dreaming Sloat could be in earnest.

"Here, I'll give you back the frame: I don't want that," said Sloat, and began fumbling at the back of the photograph. This was too much for the ladies. They, too, rushed to the rescue. One of them sprang to and shut the door, the other seized and violently shook the back of his chair, and Sloat leaped to the floor, still clinging to his prize, and laughing as though he had never had so much entertainment in his life. The long Venetian windows opened upon the piazza, and towards the nearest one he retreated, holding aloft the precious gage and waving off the attacking party with the other hand. He was within a yard of the blinds, when they were suddenly thrown open, a tall, slender form stepped quickly in, one hand seized the uplifted wrist, the other the picture, and in far less time than it takes to tell it Mr. Jerrold had wrenched it away and, with quiet bow, restored it to its rightful owner.

"Oh, I say, now, Jerrold, that's downright unhandsome of you!" gasped Sloat. "I'd have been on my way home with it."

"Shut up, you fool!" was the sharp, hissing whisper. "Wait till I go home, if you want to talk about it." And, as quickly as he came, Mr. Jerrold slipped out again upon the piazza.

Of course the story was told with varied comment all over the post. Several officers were injudicious enough to chaff the old subaltern about it, and—he was a little sore-headed the next day, anyway—the usually placid Sloat grew the more indignant at Jerrold. He decided to go and upbraid him; and, as ill luck would have it, they met before noon on the steps of the club-room.

"I want to say to you, Mr. Jerrold, that from an officer of your age to one of mine I think your conduct last night a piece of impertinence."

"I had a perfect right to do what I did," replied Jerrold, coolly. "You were taking a most unwarrantable liberty in trying to carry off that picture."

"How did you know what it was? You had never seen it!"

"There's where you are mistaken, Mr. Sloat" (and Jerrold purposely and exasperatingly refused to recognize the customary *brevet*): "I had seen it,—frequently."

Two officers were standing by, and one of them turned sharply and faced Jerrold as he spoke. It was his former company commander. Jerrold noted the symptom, and flushed, but set his teeth doggedly.

"Why, Mr. Jerrold! Mrs. Maynard said she never showed that to any one," said Sloat, in much surprise. "You heard her, did you not, Captain Chester?"

"I did, certainly," was the reply.

"All the same, I repeat what I've said," was Jerrold's sullen answer. "I have seen it frequently, and, what's more——" He suddenly stopped.

"Well, what's more?" said Sloat, suggestively.

"Never mind. I don't care to talk of the matter," replied Jerrold, and started to walk away.

But Sloat was angry, nettled, jealous. He had meant to show his intense loyalty and admiration for everything that was his colonel's, and had been snubbed and called a fool by an officer many years, though not so many "files," his junior. He never had liked him, and now there was an air of conscious superiority about Jerrold that fairly exasperated him. He angrily followed and called to him to stop, but Jerrold walked on. Captain Chester stood still and watched them. The little man had almost to run before he overtook the tall one. They were out of earshot when he finally did so. There were a few words on both sides. Then Jerrold shifted his light cane into his left hand, and Chester started forward, half expecting a fracas. To his astonishment, the two officers shook hands and parted.

"Well," said he, as Sloat came back with an angry yet bewildered face, "I'm glad you shook hands. I almost feared a row, and was just going to stop it. So he apologized, did he?"

"No, nothing like it."

"Then what did you mean by shaking hands?"

"That's nothing—never you mind," said Sloat, confusedly. "I

haven't forgiven him, by a good deal. The man's conceit is enough to disgust anything—but a woman, I suppose," he finished, ruefully.

"Well, it's none of my business, Sloat, but pardon my saying I don't see what there was to bring about the apparent reconciliation. That hand-shake meant something."

"Oh, well—damn it! we had some words, and he—or I——Well, there's a bet, and we shook hands on it."

"Seems to me that's pretty serious business, Sloat,—a bet following such a talk as you two have had. I hope——"

"Well, captain," interrupted Sloat, "I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't been mad as blazes; but I made it, and must stick to it,—that's all."

"You wouldn't mind telling me what it was, I suppose?"

"I can't; and that ends it."

Captain Chester found food for much thought and speculation over this incident. So far as he was concerned, the abrupt remark of Sloat by no means ended it. In his distrust of Jerrold, he too had taken alarm at the very substantial intimacy to which that young man was welcomed at the colonel's quarters. Prior to his marriage old Maynard had not liked him at all, but it was mainly because he had been so negligent of his duties and so determined a beau in city society after his arrival at Sibley. He had, indeed, threatened to have him transferred to a company still on frontier service if he did not reform; but then the rifle-practice season began, and Jerrold was a capital shot and sure to be on the list of competitors for the Department team, so what was the use? He would be ordered in for the rifle-camp anyway, and so the colonel decided to keep him at head-quarters. This was in the summer of the year gone by. Then came the colonel's long leave, his visit to Europe, his meeting with his old friend, now the widow of the lamented Renwick, their delightful winter together in Italy, his courtship, her consent, their marriage and return to America. When Maynard came back to Sibley and the old regiment, he was so jolly and content that every man was welcomed at his house, and it was really a source of pride and pleasure to him that his accomplished wife should find any of his young officers so thoroughly agreeable as she pronounced Mr. Jerrold. Others were soldierly, courteous, well bred, but he had the air of a foreign court about him, she privately informed her lord; and it seems, indeed, that in days gone by Mr. Jerrold's father had spent many years in France and Spain, once as his country's representative near the throne. Though the father died long before the boy was out of his knickerbockers, he had left the impress of his grand manner, and Jerrold, to women of any age, was at once a courtier and a knight. But the colonel never saw how her eyes followed the tall young officer time and again. There were women who soon noted it, and one of them said it was such a yearning, longing look. *Was* Mrs. Maynard really happy? they asked each other. *Did* she really want to see Alice mate with him, the handsome, the dangerous, the selfish fellow they knew him to be? If not, could anything be more imprudent than that they should be thrown together as they were being, day after day? Had Alice wealth of her own? If not, did the mother

know that nothing would tempt Howard Jerrold into an alliance with a dowerless daughter? These, and many more, were questions that came up every day. The garrison could talk of little else; and Alice Renwick had been there just three weeks, and was the acknowledged Queen of Hearts at Sibley, when the rifle-competitions began again, and a great array of officers and men from all over the Northwest came to the post by every train, and their canvas tents dotted the broad prairie to the north.

One lovely evening in August, just before the practice began, Colonel Maynard took his wife to drive out and see the camp. Mr. Jerrold and Alice Renwick followed on horseback. The carriage was surrounded as it halted near the range, and half a score of officers, old and young, were chatting with Mrs. Maynard, while others gathered about the lovely girl who sat there in the saddle. There came marching up from the railway a small squad of soldiers, competitors arriving from the far West. Among them—apparently their senior non-commissioned officer—was a tall cavalry sergeant, superbly built, and with a bronzed and bearded and swarthy face that seemed to tell of years of campaigning over mountain and prairie. They were all men of perfect physique, all in the neat, soldierly fatigue-dress of the regular service, some wearing the spotless white stripes of the infantry, others the less artistic and equally destructible yellow of the cavalry. Their swinging stride, erect carriage, and clear and handsome eyes all spoke of the perfection of health and soldierly development. Curious glances were turned to them as they advanced, and Miss Renwick, catching sight of the party, exclaimed,—

"Oh, who are these? And what a tall soldier that sergeant is!"

"That sergeant, Miss Renwick," said a slow, deliberate voice, "is the man I believe will knock Mr. Jerrold out of the first prize. That is Sergeant McLeod."

As though he heard his name pronounced, the tall cavalryman glanced for the first time at the group, brought his rifle to the carry as if about to salute, and was just stepping upon the roadside, where he came in full view of the occupants of the carriage, when a sudden pallor shot across his face, and he plunged heavily forward and went down like a shot. Sympathetic officers and comrades surrounded the prostrate form in an instant. The colonel himself sprang from his carriage and joined the group; a blanket was quickly brought from a neighboring tent, and the sergeant was borne thither and laid upon a cot. A surgeon felt his pulse and looked inquiringly around:

"Any of you cavalrymen know him well? Has he been affected this way before?"

A young corporal who had been bending anxiously over the sergeant straightened up and saluted:

"I know him well, sir, and have been with him five years. He's only had one sick spell in all that time,—'twas just like this,—and then he told me he'd been sunstruck once."

"This is no case of sunstroke," said the doctor. "It looks more like the heart. How long ago was the attack you speak of?"

"Three years ago last April, sir. I remember it because we'd just

got into Fort Raines after a long scout. He'd been the solidest man in the troop all through the cold and storm and snow we had in the mountains, and we were in the reading-room, and he'd picked up a newspaper and was reading while the rest of us were talking and laughing, and, first thing we knew, he was down on the floor, just like he was to-night."

"Hm!" said the surgeon. "Yes. That's plenty, steward. Give him that. Raise his head a little, corporal. Now he'll come round all right."

Driving homeward that night, Colonel Maynard musingly remarked,—

"Did you see that splendid fellow who fainted away?"

"No," answered his wife, "you all gathered about him so quickly and carried him away. I could not even catch a glimpse of him. But he had recovered, had he not?"

"Yes. Still, I was thinking what a singular fact it is that occasionally a man slips through the surgeon's examinations with such a malady as this. Now, here is one of the finest athletes and shots in the whole army, a man who has been through some hard service and stirring fights, has won a tip-top name for himself and was on the highroad to a commission, and yet this will block him effectually."

"Why, what is the trouble?"

"Some affection of the heart. Why! Halloo! Stop, driver! Orderly, jump down and run back there. Mrs. Maynard has dropped her fan.—What was it, dear?" he asked, anxiously. "You started; and you are white, and trembling."

"I—I don't know, colonel. Let us go home. It will be over in a minute. Where are Alice and Mr. Jerrold? Call them, please. She must not be out riding after dark."

But they were not in sight; and it was considerably after dark when they reached the fort. Mr. Jerrold explained that his horse had picked up a stone and he had had to walk him all the way.

IV.

There was no sleep for Captain Chester the rest of the night. He went home, threw off his sword-belt, and seated himself in a big easy-chair before his fireplace, deep in thought. Once or twice he arose and paced restlessly up and down the room, as he had done in his excited talk with Rollins some few hours before. Then he was simply angry and argumentative,—or declamatory. Now he had settled down into a very different frame of mind. He seemed awed,—stunned,—crushed. He had all the bearing and mien of one who, having defiantly predicted a calamity, was thunderstruck by the verification of his prophecy. In all his determined arraignment of Mr. Jerrold, in all the harsh things he had said and thought of him, he had never imagined any such depth of scoundrelism as the revelations of the night foreshadowed. Chester differed from many of his brotherhood: there was no room for rejoicing in his heart that the worst he had ever said of Jerrold was unequal to the apparent truth. He took no comfort to his soul that those who called him cynical, crabbed, unjust, even malicious, would

now be compelled to admit he was right in his estimate. Like the best of us, Chester could not ordinarily say "*Vade retro*" to the temptation to think, if not to say, "Didn't I tell you so?" when in every-day affairs his oft-disputed views were proved well founded. But in the face of such a catastrophe as now appeared engulfing the fair fame of his regiment and the honor of those whom his colonel held dear, Chester could feel only dismay and grief. What was his duty in the light of the discoveries he had made? To the best of his belief, he was the only man in the garrison who had evidence of Jerrold's absence from his own quarters and of the presence of *some one* at *her* window. He had taken prompt measures to prevent its being suspected by others. He purposely sent his guards to search along the cliff in the opposite direction while he went to Jerrold's room and thence back to remove the tell-tale ladder. Should he tell *any* one until he had confronted Jerrold with the evidences of his guilt, and, wringing from him his resignation, send him far from the post before handing it in? Time and again he wished Frank Armitage were here. The youngest captain in the regiment, Armitage had been for years its adjutant and deep in the confidence of Colonel Maynard. He was a thorough soldier, a strong, self-reliant, courageous man, and one for whom Chester had ever felt a warm esteem. Armitage was on leave of absence, however,—had been away some time on account of family matters, and would not return, it was known, until he had effected the removal of his mother and sister to the new home he had purchased for them in the distant East. It was to his company that Jerrold had been promoted, and there was friction from the very week that the handsome subaltern joined.

Armitage had long before "taken his measure," and was in no wise pleased that so lukewarm a soldier should have come to him as senior subaltern. They had a very plain talk, for Armitage was straightforward as a dart, and then, as Jerrold showed occasional lapses, the captain shut down on some of his most cherished privileges, and, to the indignation of society, the failure of Mr. Jerrold to appear at one or two gatherings where he was confidently expected was speedily laid at his captain's door. The recent death of his father kept Armitage from appearing in public, and, as neither he nor the major (who commanded the regiment while Maynard was abroad) vouchsafed the faintest explanation, society was allowed to form its own conclusions, and *did*,—to the effect that Mr. Jerrold was a wronged and persecuted man. It was just as the Maynards arrived at Sibley that Armitage departed on his leave, and, to his unspeakable bliss, Mr. Jerrold succeeded to the command of his company. This fact, coupled with the charming relations which were straightway established with the colonel's family, placed him in a position of independence and gave him opportunities he had never known before. It was speedily evident that he was neglecting his military duties,—that Company B was running down much faster than Armitage had built it up,—and yet no man felt like speaking of it to the colonel, who saw it only occasionally on dress-parade. Chester had just about determined to write to Armitage himself and suggest his speedy return, when this eventful night arrived.

Now he fully made up his mind that it must be done at once, and had seated himself at his desk, when the roar of the sunrise gun and the blare of the bugles warned him that reveille had come and he must again go to his guard. Before he returned to his quarters another complication, even more embarrassing, had arisen, and the letter to Armitage was postponed.

He had received the "present" of his guard and verified the presence of all his prisoners, when he saw Major Sloat still standing out in the middle of the parade, where the adjutant usually received the reports of the roll-calls. Several company officers, having made their reports, were scurrying back to quarters for another snooze before breakfast-time or to get their cup of coffee before going out to the range. Chester strolled over towards him.

"What's the matter, Sloat?"

"Nothing much. The colonel told me to receive the reveille reports for Hoyt this week. He's on general court-martial."

"Yes, I know all that. I mean, what are you waiting for?"

"Mr. Jerrold again. There's no report from his company."

"Have you sent to wake him?"

"No; I'll go myself, and do it thoroughly, too." And the little major turned sharply away and walked direct to the low range of bachelor quarters, dove under the piazza, and into the green doorway.

Hardly knowing how to explain his action, Chester quickly followed, and in less than a minute was standing in the self-same parlor which, by the light of a flickering match, he had searched two hours before. Here he halted and listened, while Sloat pushed on into the bedroom and was heard vehemently apostrophizing some sleeper:

"Does the government pay you for this sort of thing, I want to know? Get up, Jerrold! This is the second time you've cut reveille in ten days. Get up, I say!" And the major was vigorously shaking at something, for the bed creaked and groaned.

"Wake up! I say, I'm blowed if I'm going to get up here day after day and have you sleeping. Wake, Nicodemus! Wake, you snoozing, snoring, open-mouthed masher. Come, now; I mean it."

A drowsy, disgusted yawn and stretch finally rewarded his efforts. Mr. Jerrold at last opened his eyes, rolled over, yawned sulkily again, and tried to evade his persecutor, but to no purpose. Like a little terrier, Sloat hung on to him and worried and shook.

"Oh, don't! damn it, don't!" growled the victim. "What do you want, anyway? Has that infernal reveille gone?"

"Yes, and you're absent again, and no report from B Company. By the holy poker, if you don't turn out and get it and report to me on the parade I'll spot the whole gang absent, and then no *matinée* for you to-day, my buck. Come, out with you! I mean it. Hall says you and he have an engagement in town; and 'pon my soul I'll bust it if you don't come out."

And so, growling and complaining, and yet half laughing, Adonis rolled from his couch and began to get into his clothes. Chester's blood ran cold, then boiled. Think of a man who could laugh like

that,—and remember! *When*, how, had he returned to the house? Listen!

"Confound you, Sloat, *I* wouldn't rout *you* out in this shabby way. Why couldn't you let a man sleep? I'm tired half to death."

"What have you done to tire you? Slept all yesterday afternoon, and danced perhaps a dozen times at the doctor's last night. You've had more sleep than I've had, begad! You took Miss Renwick home before 'twas over, and mean it was of you, too, with all the fellows that wanted to dance with her."

"That wasn't my fault: Mrs. Maynard made her promise to be home at twelve. You old cackler, that's what sticks in your crop yet. You are persecuting me because they like me so much better than they do you," he went on, laughingly now. "Come, now, Sloat, confess, it is all because you're jealous. You couldn't have that picture, and I could."

Chester fairly started. He had urgent need to see this young gallant,—he was staying for that purpose,—but should he listen to further talk like this? Too late to move, for Sloat's answer came like a shot:

"I bet you you *never* could!"

"But didn't I tell you I had?—a week ago?"

"Ay, but I didn't believe it. You couldn't show it!"

"Pshaw, man! Look here. Stop, though! Remember, *on your honor*, you never tell."

"On my honor, of course."

"Well, there!"

A drawer was opened. Chester heard a gulp of dismay, of genuine astonishment and conviction mixed, as Sloat muttered some half-articulate words and then came into the front room. Jerrold followed, caught sight of Chester, and stopped short, with sudden and angry change of color.

"I did not know *you* were here," he said.

"It was to find where *you* were that I came," was the quiet answer.

There was a moment's silence. Sloat turned and looked at the two men in utter surprise. Up to this time he had considered Jerrold's absence from reveille as a mere dereliction of duty which was ascribable to the laziness and indifference of the young officer. So far as lay in his power, he meant to make him attend more strictly to business, and had therefore come to his quarters and stirred him up. But there was no thought of any serious trouble in his mind. His talk had all been roughly good-humored until—until that bet was mentioned, and then it became earnest. Now, as he glanced from one man to the other, he saw in an instant that something new—something of unusual gravity—was impending. Chester, buttoned to the throat in his dark uniform, accurately gloved and belted, with pale, set, almost haggard face, was standing by the centre-table under the drop-light. Jerrold, only half dressed, his feet thrust into slippers, his fingers nervously working at the studs of his dainty white shirt, had stopped short at his bedroom door, and, with features that grew paler every second and a dark scowl on his brow, was glowering at Chester.

"Since when has it been the duty of the officer of the day to come around and hunt up officers who don't happen to be out at reveille?" he asked.

"It is not your absence from reveille I want explained, Mr. Jerrold," was the cold and deliberate answer. "I wanted you at 3.30 this morning, and you were not and had not been here."

An unmistakable start and shock; a quick, nervous, hunted glance around the room, so cold and pallid in the early light of the August morning; a clutch of Jerrold's slim brown hand at the bared throat. But he rallied gamely, strode a step forward, and looked his superior full in the face. Sloat marked the effort with which he cleared away the huskiness that seemed to clog his larynx, but admired the spunk with which the young officer returned the senior's shot:

"What is your authority here, I would like to know? What business has the officer of the day to want me or any other man not on guard? Captain Chester, you seem to forget that I am no longer your second lieutenant, and that I am a company commander like yourself. Do you come by Colonel Maynard's order to search my quarters and question me? If so, say so at once; if not, get out." And Jerrold's face was growing black with wrath, and his big lustrous eyes were wide awake now and fairly snapping.

Chester leaned upon the table and deliberated a moment. He stood there coldly, distrustfully eying the excited lieutenant, then turned to Sloat:

"I will be responsible for the roll-call of Company B this morning, Sloat. I have a matter of grave importance to bring up to this—this gentleman, and it is of a private nature. Will you let me see him alone?"

"Sloat," said Jerrold, "don't go yet. I want you to stay. These are my quarters, and I recognize your right to come here in search of me, since I was not at reveille; but I want a witness here to bear me out. I'm too amazed yet—too confounded by this intrusion of Captain Chester's to grasp the situation. I never heard of such a thing as this. Explain it, if you can."

"Mr. Jerrold, what I have to ask or say to you concerns you alone. It is *not* an official matter. It is as man to man I want to see you, alone and at once. *Now* will you let Major Sloat retire?"

Silence for a moment. The angry flush on Jerrold's face was dying away, and in its place an ashen pallor was spreading from throat to brow; his lips were twitching ominously. Sloat looked in consternation at the sudden change.

"Shall I go?" he finally asked.

Jerrold looked long, fixedly, searchingly in the set face of the officer of the day, breathing hard and heavily. What he saw there Sloat could not imagine. At last his hand dropped by his side; he made a little motion with it, a slight wave towards the door, and again dropped it nervously. His lips seemed to frame the word "Go," but he never glanced at the man whom a moment before he so masterfully bade to stay; and Sloat, sorely puzzled, left the room.

Not until his footsteps had died out of hearing did Chester speak:

"How soon can you leave the post?"

"I don't understand you."

"How soon can you pack up what you need to take and—get away?"

"Get away where? What on earth do you mean?"

"You *must* know what I mean! You *must* know that after last night's work you quit the service at once and forever."

"I don't know anything of the kind; and I defy you to prove the faintest thing." But Jerrold's fingers were twitching, and his eyes had lost their light.

"Do you suppose I did not recognize you?" asked Chester.

"When?—where?" gulped Jerrold.

"When I seized you and you struck me!"

"I never struck you. I don't know what you mean."

"My God, man, let us end this useless fencing. The evidence I have of your last night's scoundrelism would break the strongest record. For the regiment's sake,—for the colonel's sake,—let us have no public scandal. It's awful enough as the thing stands. Write your resignation, give it to me, and leave,—before breakfast if you can."

"I've done nothing to resign for. You know perfectly well I haven't."

"Do you mean that such a crime—that a woman's ruin and disgrace—isn't enough to drive you from the service?" asked Chester, tingling in every nerve and longing to clinch the shapely, swelling throat in his clutching fingers. "God of heaven, Jerrold! are you dead to all sense of decency?"

"Captain Chester, I won't be bullied this way. I may not be immaculate, but no man on earth shall talk to me like this! I deny your insinuations. I've done nothing to warrant your words, even if—if you did come sneaking around here last night and find me absent. You can't prove a thing. You——"

"What! When I saw you,—almost caught you! By heaven! I wish the sentry had killed you then and there. I never dreamed of such hardihood."

"You've done nothing *but* dream. By Jove, I believe you're sleep-walking yet. What on earth do you mean by catching and killing me? 'Pon my soul I reckon you're crazy, Captain Chester." And color was gradually coming back again to Jerrold's face, and confidence to his tone.

"Enough of this, Mr. Jerrold. Knowing what you and I both know, do you refuse to hand me your resignation?"

"Of course I do."

"Do you mean to deny to me where I saw you last night?"

"I deny your right to question me. I deny anything,—everything. I believe you simply thought you had a clue and could make me tell. Suppose I *was* out last night. I don't believe you know the faintest thing about it."

"Do you want me to report the whole thing to the colonel?"

"Of course I don't. Naturally, I want him to know nothing about my being out of quarters; and it's a thing that no officer would

think of reporting another for. You'll only win the contempt of every gentleman in the regiment if you do it. What good will it do you?—Keep me from going to town for a few days, I suppose. What earthly business is it of yours, anyway?"

"Jerrold, I can stand this no longer. I ought to shoot you in your tracks, I believe. You've brought ruin and misery to the home of my warmest friend, and dishonor to the whole service, and you talk of two or three days' stoppage from going to town. If I can't bring you to your senses, by God! the colonel shall." And he wheeled and left the room.

For a moment Jerrold stood stunned and silent. It was useless to attempt reply. The captain was far down the walk when he sprang to the door to call him again. Then, hurrying back to the bedroom, he hastily dressed, muttering angrily and anxiously to himself as he did so. He was thinking deeply, too, and every movement betrayed nervousness and trouble. Returning to the front door, he gazed out upon the parade, then took his forage-cap and walked rapidly down towards the adjutant's office. The orderly bugler was tilted up in a chair, leaning half asleep against the whitewashed front, but his was a weasel nap, for he sprang up and saluted as the young officer approached.

"Where did Major Sloat go, orderly?" was the hurried question.

"Over towards the stables, sir. Him and Captain Chester was here together, and they're just gone."

"Run over to the quarters of B Company and tell Merrick I want him right away. Tell him to come to my quarters." And thither Mr. Jerrold returned, seated himself at his desk, wrote several lines of a note, tore it into fragments, began again, wrote another which seemed not entirely satisfactory, and was in the midst of a third when there came a quick step and a knock at the door. Opening the shutters, he glanced out of the window. A gust of wind sent some of the papers whirling and flying, and the bedroom door banged shut, but not before some few half-sheets of paper had fluttered out upon the parade, where other little flurries of the morning breeze sent them sailing over towards the colonel's quarters. Anxious only for the coming of Merrick and no one else, Mr. Jerrold no sooner saw who was at the front door than he closed the shutters, called, "Come in!" and a short, squat, wiry little man, dressed in the fatigue-uniform of the infantry, stood at the door-way to the hall.

"Come in here, Merrick," said the lieutenant, and Merrick came.

"How much is it you owe me now?—thirty-odd dollars, I think?"

"I believe it is, lieutenant," answered the man, with shifting eyes and general uneasiness of mien.

"You are not ready to pay it, I suppose; and you got it from me when we left Fort Raines, to help you out of that scrape there."

The soldier looked down and made no answer.

"Merrick, I want a note taken to town at once. I want *you* to take it and get it to its address before eight o'clock. I want you to say no word to a soul. Here's ten dollars. Hire old Murphy's horse across the river and *go*. If you are put in the guard-house when you get back, don't say a word; if you are tried by garrison court for crossing the bridge or absence without leave, plead guilty, make no

defence, and I'll pay you double your fine and let you off the thirty dollars. But if you fail me, or tell a soul of your errand, I'll write to —you know who, at Raines. Do you understand, and agree?"

"I do. Yessir."

"Go and get ready, and be here in ten minutes."

Meantime, Captain Chester had followed Sloat to the adjutant's office. He was boiling over with indignation which he hardly knew how to control. He found the gray-moustached subaltern tramping in great perplexity up and down the room, and the instant he entered was greeted with the inquiry,—

"What's gone wrong? What's Jerrold been doing?"

"Don't ask me any questions, Sloat, but answer. It is a matter of honor. *What* was your bet with Jerrold?"

"I oughtn't to tell that, Chester. Surely it cannot be a matter mixed up with this."

"I can't explain, Sloat. What I ask is unavoidable. Tell me about that bet."

"Why, he was so superior and airy, you know, and was trying to make me feel that he was so much more intimate with them all at the colonel's, and that he could have that picture for the mere asking; and I got mad, and bet him he *never* could."

"Was that the day you shook hands on it?"

"Yes."

"And that was her picture—*the* picture, then—he showed you this morning."

"Chester, you heard the conversation: you were there: *you* know that I'm on honor not to tell."

"Yes, I know. That's quite enough."

V.

Before seven o'clock that same morning Captain Chester had come to the conclusion that only one course was left open for him. After the brief talk with Sloat at the office he had increased the perplexity and distress of that easily-muddled soldier by requesting his company in a brief visit to the stables and corrals. A "square" and reliable old veteran was the quartermaster sergeant who had charge of those establishments; Chester had known him for years, and his fidelity and honesty were matters the officers of his former regiment could not too highly commend. When Sergeant Parks made an official statement there was no shaking its solidity. He slept in a little box of a house close by the entrance to the main stable, in which were kept the private horses of several of the officers, and among them Mr. Jerrold's; and it was his boast that, day or night, no horse left that stable without his knowledge. The old man was superintending the morning labors of the stable-hands, and looked up in surprise at so early a visit from the officer of the day.

"Were you here all last night, sergeant?" was Chester's abrupt question.

"Certainly, sir, and up until one o'clock or more."

"Were any horses out during the night,—any officers' horses, I mean?"

"No, sir, not one."

"I thought possibly some officers might have driven or ridden to town."

"No, sir. The only horses that crossed this threshold going out last night were Mr. Sutton's team from town. They were put up here until near one o'clock, and then the doctor sent over for them. I locked up right after that, and can swear nothing else went out."

Chester entered the stable and looked curiously around. Presently his eye lighted on a tall, rangy bay horse that was being groomed in a wide stall near the door-way.

"That's Mr. Jerrold's Roderick, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. He's fresh as a daisy, too,—hasn't been out for three days,—and Mr. Jerrold's going to drive the dog-cart this morning."

Chester turned away.

"Sloat," said he, as they left the stable, "if Mr. Jerrold was away from the post last night,—and you heard me say he was out of his quarters,—could he have gone any way except afoot, after what you heard Parks say?"

"Gone in the Suttons' outfit, I suppose," was Sloat's cautious answer.

"In which event he would have been seen by the sentry at the bridge, would he not?"

"Ought to have been, certainly."

"Then we'll go back to the guard-house." And, wonderingly and uncomfortably, Sloat followed. He had long since begun to wish he had held his peace and said nothing about the confounded roll-call. He hated rows of any kind. He didn't like Jerrold, but he would have crawled *ventre à terre* across the wide parade sooner than see a scandal in the regiment he loved; and it was becoming apparent to his sluggish faculties that it was no mere matter of absence from quarters that was involving Jerrold. Chester was all aflame over that picture-business, he remembered, and the whole drift of his present investigation was to prove that Jerrold was *not* absent from the post, but absent only from his quarters. If so, where had he spent his time until nearly four? Sloat's heart was heavy with vague apprehension. He knew that Jerrold had borne Alice Renwick away from the party at an unusually early hour for such things to break up. He knew that he and others had protested against such desertion, but she declared it could not be helped. He remembered another thing,—a matter that he thought of at the time, only from another point of view. It now seemed to have significance bearing on this very matter; for Chester suddenly asked,—

"Wasn't it rather odd that Miss Beaubien was not here at the dance? She has never missed one, seems to me, since Jerrold began spooning with her last year."

"Why, she *was* here."

"She was? Are you sure? Rollins never spoke of it; and we had been talking of her. I inferred from what he said that she was

not there at all. And I saw her drive homeward with her mother right after parade: so it didn't occur to me that she could have come out again, all that distance, in time for the dance. Singular! Why shouldn't Rollins have told me?"

Sloat grinned: a dreary sort of smile it was, too. "You go into society so seldom you don't see these things. I've more than half suspected Rollins of being quite ready to admire Miss Beaubien himself; and since Jerrold dropped her he has had plenty of opportunity."

"Great guns! I never thought of it! If I'd known she was to be there I'd have gone myself last night. How did she behave to Miss Renwick?"

"Why, sweet and smiling, and chipper as you please. If anything, I think Miss Renwick was cold and distant to her. I couldn't make it out at all."

"And did Jerrold dance with her?"

"Once, I think, and they had a talk out on the piazza,—just a minute. I happened to be at the door, and couldn't help seeing it; and what got me was this: Mr. Hall came out with Miss Renwick on his arm; they were chatting and laughing as they passed me, but the moment she caught sight of Jerrold and Miss Beaubien she stopped, and said, 'I think I won't stay out here; it's too chilly,' or something like it, and went right in; and then Jerrold dropped Miss Beaubien and went after her. He just handed the young lady over to me, saying he was engaged for next dance, and skipped."

"How did she like that? Wasn't she furious?"

"No. That's another thing that got me. She smiled after him, all sweetness, and—well, she *did* say, 'I count upon you,—you'll be there,' and he nodded. Oh, she was bright as a button after that."

"What did she mean?—be 'where,' do you suppose? Sloat, this all means more to me, and to us all, than I can explain."

"I don't know. I can't imagine."

"Was it to see her again that night?"

"I don't know at all. If it was, he fooled her, for he never went near her again. Rollins put her in the carriage."

"Whose? Did she come out with the Suttons?"

"Why, certainly. I thought you knew that."

"And neither old Madame Beaubien nor Mrs. Sutton with them? What was the old squaw thinking of?"

By this time they had neared the guard-house, where several of the men were seated awaiting the call for the next relief. All arose at the shout of the sentry on Number One, turning out the guard for the officer of the day. Chester made hurried and impatient acknowledgment of the salute, and called to the sergeant to send him the sentry who was at the bridge at one o'clock. It turned out to be a young soldier who had enlisted at the post only six months before and was already known as one of the most intelligent and promising candidates for a corporalship in the garrison.

"Were you on duty at the bridge at one o'clock, Carey?" asked the captain.

"I was, sir. My relief went on at 11.45 and came off at 1.45."

"What persons passed your post during that time?"

"There was a squad or two of men coming back from town on pass. I halted them, sir, and Corporal Murray came down and passed them in."

"I don't mean coming from town. Who went the other way?"

"Only one carriage, sir,—Mr. Sutton's."

"Could you see who were in it?"

"Certainly, sir: it was right under the lamp-post this end of the bridge that I stood when I challenged. Lieutenant Rollins answered for them and passed them out. He was sitting beside Mr. Sutton as they drove up, then jumped out and gave me the countersign and bade them good-night right there."

"Rollins again," thought Chester. "Why did he keep this from me?"

"Who were in the carriage?" he asked.

"Mr. Sutton, sir, on the front seat, driving, and two young ladies on the back seat."

"Nobody else?"

"Not a soul, sir. I could see in it plain as day. One lady was Miss Sutton, and the other Miss Beaubien. I know I was surprised at seeing the latter, because she drove home in her own carriage last evening right after parade. I was on post there at that hour too, sir. The second relief is on from 5.45 to 7.45."

"That will do, Carey. I see your relief is forming now."

As the officers walked away and Sloat silently plodded along beside his dark-browed senior, the latter turned to him:

"I should say that there was no way in which Mr. Jerrold could have gone townwards last night. Should not you?"

"He might have crossed the bridge while the third relief was on, and got a horse at the other side."

"He didn't do that, Sloat. I had already questioned the sentry on that relief. It was the third that I inspected and visited this morning."

"Well, how do you know he wanted to go to town? Why couldn't he have gone up the river, or out to the range? Perhaps there was a little game of 'draw' out at camp."

"There was no light in camp, much less a little game of draw, after eleven o'clock. You know well enough that there is nothing of that kind going on with Gaines in command. That isn't Jerrold's game, even if those fellows *were* bent on ruining their eyesight and nerve and spoiling the chance of getting the men on the division and army teams. I wish it *were* his game, instead of what it is!"

"Still, Chester, he may have been out in the country somewhere. You seem bent on the conviction he was up to mischief here, around this post. I won't ask you what you mean; but there's more than one way of getting to town if a man wants to very bad."

"How? Of course he can take a skiff and row down the river; but he'd never be back in time for reveille. There goes six o'clock, and I must get home and shave and think this over. Keep your own counsel, no matter who asks you. If you hear any questions or talk about shooting last night, you know nothing, heard nothing, and saw nothing."

"Shooting last night!" exclaimed Sloat, all agog with eagerness and excitement now. "Where was it? Who was it?"

But Chester turned a deaf ear upon him, and walked away. He wanted to see Rollins, and went straight home.

"Why didn't you tell me Miss Beaubien was out here last night?" was the question he asked as soon as he had entered the room where, all aglow from his cold bath, the youngster was dressing for breakfast. He colored vividly, then laughed.

"Well, you never gave me much chance to say anything, did you? You talked all the time, as I remember, and suddenly vanished and slammed the door. I would have told you had you asked me." But all the same it was evident for the first time that here was a subject Rollins was shy of mentioning.

"Did you go down and see them across sentry post?"

"Certainly. Jerrold asked me to. He said he had to take Miss Renwick home, and was too tired to come back,—was going to turn in. I was glad to do anything to be civil to the Suttons."

"Why, I'd like to know? They have never invited you to the house or shown you any attention whatever. You are not their style at all, Rollins, and I'm glad of it. It wasn't for their sake you stayed there until one o'clock instead of being here in bed. I wish—" and he looked wistfully, earnestly, at his favorite now, "I wish I could think it wasn't for the sake of Miss Beaubien's black eyes and aboriginal beauty."

"Look here, captain," said Rollins, with another rush of color to his face; "you don't seem to fancy Miss Beaubien, and—she's a friend of mine, and one I don't like to hear slightingly spoken of. You said a good deal last night that—well, wasn't pleasant to hear."

"I know it, Rollins. I beg your pardon. I didn't know then that you were more than slightly acquainted with her. I'm an old bat, and go out very little, but some things are pretty clear to my eyes, and—don't you be falling in love with Nina Beaubien. That is no match for you."

"I'm sure you never had a word to say against her father. The old colonel was a perfect type of the French gentleman, from all I hear."

"Yes, and her mother is as perfect a type of a Chippewa squaw, if she is only a half-breed and claims to be only a sixteenth. Rollins, there's Indian blood enough in Nina Beaubien's little finger to make me afraid of her. She is strong as death in love or hate, and you must have seen how she hung on Jerrold's every word all last winter. You must know she is not the girl to be lightly dropped now."

"She told me only a day or two ago they were the best of friends and had never been anything else," said Rollins, hotly.

"Has it gone that far, my boy? I had not thought it so bad, by any means. It's no use talking with a man who has lost his heart: his reason goes with it." And Chester turned away.

"You don't know anything about it," was all poor Rollins could think of as a suitable thing to shout after him; and it made no more impression than it deserved.

As has been said, Captain Chester had decided before seven o'clock that but one course lay open to him in the matter as now developed. Had Armitage been there he would have had an adviser, but there was no other man whose counsel he cared to seek. Old Captain Gray was as bitter against Jerrold as Chester himself, and with even better reason, for he knew well the cause of his little daughter's listless manner and tearful eyes. She had been all radiance and joy at the idea of coming to Sibley and being near the great cities, but not one happy look had he seen in her sweet and wistful face since the day of her arrival. Wilton, too, was another captain who disliked Jerrold; and Chester's rugged sense of fair play told him that it was not among the enemies of the young officer that he should now seek advice, but that if he had a friend among the older and wiser heads in the regiment it was due to him that that older and wiser head be given a chance to think a little for Jerrold's sake. And there was not one among the seniors whom he could call upon. As he ran over their names, Chester for the first time realized that his ex-subaltern had not a friend among the captains and senior officers now on duty at the fort. His indifference to duties, his airy foppishness, his conceit and self-sufficiency, had all served to create a feeling against him; and this had been intensified by his conduct since coming to Sibley. The youngsters still kept up jovial relations with and professed to like him, but among the seniors there were many men who had only a nod for him on meeting. Wilton had epitomized the situation by saying he "had no use for a masher," and poor old Gray had one day scowlingly referred to him as "the professional beauty."

In view of all this feeling, Chester would gladly have found some man to counsel further delay; but there was none. He felt that he must inform the colonel at once of the fact that Mr. Jerrold was absent from his quarters at the time of the firing, of his belief that it was Jerrold who struck him and sped past the sentry in the dark, and of his conviction that the sooner the young officer was called to account for his strange conduct the better. As to the episodes of the ladder, the lights, and the form at the dormer-window, he meant, for the present at least, to lock them in his heart.

But he forgot that others too must have heard those shots, and that others too would be making inquiries.

VI.

A lovely morning it was that beamed on Sibley and the broad and beautiful valley of the Cloudwater when once the sun got fairly above the moist horizon. Mist and vapor and heavy cloud all seemed swallowed up in the gathering, glowing warmth, as though the King of Day had risen athirst and drained the welcoming cup of nature. It must have rained at least a little during the darkness of the night, for dew there could have been none with skies so heavily overcast, and yet the short smooth turf on the parade, the leaves upon the little shade-trees around the quadrangle, and all the beautiful vines here on the trellis-work of the colonel's veranda, shone and sparkled in the radiant light. The roses in the little garden, and the old-fashioned morning-glory

vines over at the east side, were all a-glitter in the flooding sunshine when the bugler came out from a glance at the clock in the adjutant's office and sounded "sick-call" to the indifferent ear of the garrison. Once each day, at 7.30 A.M., the doctor trudged across to the hospital and looked over the half-dozen "hopelessly healthy" but would-be invalids who wanted to get off guard duty or a morning at the range. Thanks to the searching examination to which every soldier must be subjected before he can enter the service of Uncle Sam, and to the disciplined order of the lives of the men at Sibley, maladies of any serious nature were almost unknown. It was a gloriously healthy post, as everybody admitted, and, to judge from the specimen of young-womanhood that came singing, "blithe and low," out among the roses this same joyous morning, exuberant physical well-being was not restricted to the men.

A fairer picture never did dark beauty present than Alice Renwick, as she bent among the bushes or reached high among the vines in search of her favorite flowers. Tall, slender, willowy, yet with exquisitely-rounded form; slim, dainty little hands and feet; graceful arms and wrists all revealed in the flowing sleeves of her snowy, web-like gown, fitting her and displaying her sinuous grace of form as gowns so seldom do to-day. And then her face!—a glorious picture of rich, ripe, tropical beauty, with its great, soulful, sunlit eyes, heavily shaded though they were with those wondrous lashes; beautiful, too, in contour as was the lithe body, and beautiful in every feature, even to the rare and dewy curve of her red lips, half opened as she sang. She was smiling to herself, as she crooned her soft, murmuring melody, and every little while the great dark eyes glanced over towards the shaded doors of Bachelors' Row. There was no one up to watch and tell: why should she not look thither, and even stand one moment peering under the veranda at a darkened window half-way down the row, as though impatient at the non-appearance of some familiar signal? How came the laggard late? How slept the knight while here his lady stood impatient? She twined the leaves and roses in a fragrant knot, ran lightly within and laid them on the snowy cloth beside the colonel's seat at table, came forth and plucked some more and fastened them, blushing, blissful, in the lace-fringed opening of her gown, through which, soft and creamy, shone the perfect neck.

"Daisy, tell my fortune, pray:
He loves me not,—he loves me,"

she blithely sang, then, hurrying to the gate, shaded her eyes with the shapely hand and gazed intently. 'Twas nearing eight,—nearing breakfast-time. But some one was coming. Horrid! Captain Chester, of all men! Coming, of course, to see papa, and papa not yet down, and mamma had a headache and had decided not to come down at all, she would breakfast in her room. What girl on earth when looking and longing and waiting for the coming of a graceful youth of twenty-six would be anything but dismayed at the substitution therefor of a bulky, heavy-hearted captain of forty-six, no matter if he were still unmarried? And yet her smile was sweet and cordial.

"Why, good-morning, Captain Chester. I'm so glad to see you this bright day. Do come in and let me give you a rose. Papa will soon be down." And she opened the gate and held forth one long, slim hand. He took it slowly, as though in a dream, raising his forage-cap at the same time, yet making no reply. He was looking at her far more closely than he imagined. How fresh, how radiant, how fair and gracious and winning! Every item of her attire was so pure and white and spotless; every fold and curve of her gown seemed charged with subtile, delicate fragrance, as faint and sweet as the shy and modest wood-violet's. She noted his silence and his haggard eyes. She noted the intent gaze, and the color mounted straightway to her forehead.

"And have you no word of greeting for me?" she blithely laughed, striving to break through the awkwardness of his reserve, "or are you worn out with your night watch as officer of the day?"

He fairly started. Had she seen him, then? Did she know it was he who stood beneath her window, he who leaped in chase of that scoundrel, he who stole away with that heavy tell-tale ladder? and, knowing all this, could she stand there smiling in his face, the incarnation of maiden innocence and beauty? Impossible! Yet what could she mean?

"How did you know I had so long a vigil?" he asked, and the cold, strained tone, the half-averted eyes, the pallor of his face, all struck her at once. Instantly her manner changed:

"Oh, forgive me, captain. I see you are all worn out; and I'm keeping you here at the gate. Come to the piazza and sit down. I'll tell papa you are here, for I know you want to see him." And she tripped lightly away before he could reply, and rustled up the stairs. He could hear her light tap at the colonel's door, and her soft, clear, flute-like voice: "Papa, Captain Chester is here to see you."

Papa indeed! She spoke to him and of him as though he were her own. He treated her as though she were his flesh and blood,—as though he loved her devotedly. Even before she came had not they been prepared for this? Did not Mrs. Maynard tell them that Alice had become enthusiastically devoted to her step-father and considered him the most knightly and chivalric hero she had ever seen? He could hear the colonel's hearty and loving tone in reply, and then she came fluttering down again:

"Papa will be with you in five minutes, captain. But won't you let me give you some coffee? It's all ready, and you look so tired,—even ill."

"I have had a bad night," he answered, "but I'm growing old, and cannot stand sleeplessness as you young people seem to."

Was she faltering? He watched her eagerly, narrowly, almost wonderingly. Not a trace of confusion, not a sign of fear; and yet had he not *seen* her, and that other figure?

"I wish you could sleep as I do," was the prompt reply. "I was in the land of dreams ten minutes after my head touched the pillow, and mamma made me come home early last night because of our journey to-day. You know we are going down to visit Aunt Grace, Colonel Maynard's sister, at Lake Sablon, and mamma wanted me to

be looking my freshest and best," she said, "and I never heard a thing till reveille."

His eyes, sad, penetrating, doubting,—yet self-doubting, too,—searched her very soul. Unflinchingly the dark orbs looked into his,—even pityingly; for she quickly spoke again:

"Captain, *do* come into the breakfast-room and have some coffee. You have not breakfasted, I'm sure."

He raised his hand as though to repel her offer,—even to put her aside. He *must* understand her. He *could* not be hoodwinked in this way.

"Pardon me, Miss Renwick, but did you hear nothing strange last night or early this morning? Were you not disturbed at all?"

"I? No, indeed!" True, her face had changed now, but there was no fear in her eyes. It was a look of apprehension, perhaps, of concern and curiosity mingled, for his tone betrayed that something had happened which caused him agitation.

"And you heard no shots fired?"

"Shots! No! Oh, Captain Chester! what does it mean? *Who* was shot? Tell me!"

And now, with paling face and wild apprehension in her eyes, she turned and gazed beyond him, past the vines and the shady veranda, across the sunshine of the parade and under the old piazza, searching that still closed and darkened window.

"Who?" she implored, her hands clasping nervously, her eyes returning eagerly to his face.

"It was not Mr. Jerrold," he answered, coldly. "He is unhurt, so far as shot is concerned."

"Then how is he hurt? Is he hurt at all?" she persisted; and then as she met his gaze her eyes fell, and the burning blush of maiden shame surged up to her forehead. She sank upon a seat and covered her face with her hands.

"I thought of Mr. Jerrold, naturally. He said he would be over early this morning," was all she could find to say.

"I have seen him, and presume he will come. To all appearances, he is the last man to suffer from last night's affair," he went on, relentlessly,—almost brutally,—but she never winced. "It is odd you did not hear the shots. I thought yours was the northwest room,—this one?" he indicated, pointing overhead.

"So it is, and I slept there all last night and heard nothing,—not a thing. *Do* tell me what the trouble was."

Then what was there for him to say? The colonel's footsteps were heard upon the stair, and the colonel, with extended hand and beaming face and cheery welcome, came forth from the open door-way:

"Welcome, Chester! I'm glad you've come just in time for breakfast. Mrs. Maynard won't be down. She slept badly last night, and is sleeping now. What was the firing last night? I did not hear it at the time, but the orderly and old Maria the cook were discussing it as I was shaving."

"It is that I came to see you about, colonel. I am the man to hold responsible."

"No prisoners got away, I hope?"

"No, sir. Nothing, I fear, that would seem to justify my action. I ordered Number Five to fire."

"Why, what on earth could have happened around there,—almost back of us?" said the colonel, in surprise.

"I do not know what had happened, or what was going to happen." And Chester paused a moment, and glanced towards the door through which Miss Renwick had retired as soon as the colonel arrived. The old soldier seemed to understand the glance. "*She* would not listen," he said, proudly.

"I know," explained Chester. "I think it best that no one but you should hear anything of the matter for the present until I have investigated further. It was nearly half-past three this morning as I got around here on Five's post, inspecting sentinels, and came suddenly in the darkness upon a man carrying a ladder on his shoulder. I ordered him to halt. The reply was a violent blow, and the ladder and I were dropped at the same instant, while the man sprang into space and darted off in the direction of Number Five. I followed quick as I could, heard the challenge and the cries of halt, and shouted to Leary to fire. He did, but missed his aim in the haste and darkness, and the man got safely away. Of course there is much talk and speculation about it around the post this morning, for several people heard the shots besides the guard, and, although I told Leary and others to say nothing, I know it is already generally known."

"Oh, well, come in to breakfast," said the colonel. "We'll talk it over there."

"Pardon me, sir, I cannot. I must get back home before guard-mount, and Rollins is probably waiting to see me now. I—I could not discuss it at the table, for there are some singular features about the matter."

"Why, in God's name, what?" asked the colonel, with sudden and deep anxiety.

"Well, sir, an officer of the garrison is placed in a compromising position by this affair, and cannot or will not explain."

"Who?"

"Mr. Jerrold, sir."

"Jerrold! Why, I got a note from him not ten minutes ago saying he had an engagement in town and asking permission to go before guard-mounting, if Mr. Hall was ready. Hall wanted to go with him, Jerrold wrote, but Hall has not applied for permission to leave the post."

"It is Jerrold who is compromised, colonel. I may be all wrong in my suspicions, all wrong in reporting the matter to you at all, but in my perplexity and distress I see no other way. Frankly, sir, the moment I caught sight of the man he looked like Jerrold; and two minutes after the shots were fired I inspected Jerrold's quarters. He was not there, though the lamps were burning very low in the bedroom, and his bed had not been occupied at all. When you see Leary, sir, he will tell you that he also thought it must be Mr. Jerrold."

"The young scapegrace!—been off to town, I suppose."

"Colonel," said Chester, quickly, "you—not I—must decide that. I went to his quarters after reveille, and he was then there, and resented my visit and questions, admitted that he had been out during the night, but refused to make any statement to me."

"Well, Chester, I will haul him up after breakfast. Possibly he had been up to the rifle-camp, or had driven to town after the doctor's party. Of course *that* must be stopped; but I'm glad you missed him. It, of course, staggers a man's judgment to be knocked down, but if you had killed him it might have been as serious for you as this knock-down blow will be for him. That is the worst phase of the matter. What could he have been thinking of? He must have been either drunk or mad; and he rarely drank. Oh, dear, dear, dear, but that's very bad, —very bad,—striking the officer of the day! Why, Chester, that's the worst thing that's happened in the regiment since I took command of it. It's about the worst thing that *could* have happened to us. Of course he must go in arrest. I'll see the adjutant right after breakfast. I'll be over early, Chester." And with grave and worried face the colonel bade him adieu.

As he turned away, Chester heard him saying again to himself, "About the worst thing he could have done!—the worst thing he could have done!" And the captain's heart sank within him. What would the colonel say when he knew how far, far worse was the foul wrong Mr. Jerrold had done to him and his?

VII.

Before guard-mounting—almost half an hour before his usual time for appearing at the office—Colonel Maynard hurried in to his desk, sent the orderly for Captain Chester, and then the clerks in the sergeant-major's room heard him close and lock the door. As the subject of the shooting was already under discussion among the men there assembled, this action on the part of the chief was considered highly significant. It was hardly five minutes before Chester came, looked surprised at finding the door locked, knocked, and was admitted.

The look on the haggard face at the desk, the dumb misery in the eyes, the wrath and horror in it all, carried him back twenty years to that gloomy morning in the casemates when the story was passed around that Captain Maynard had lost a wife and an intimate friend during the previous night. Chester saw at a glance that, despite his precautions, the blow had come, the truth been revealed at one fell swoop.

"Lock the door again, Chester, and come here. I have some questions to ask you."

The captain silently took the chair which was indicated by a wave of the colonel's hand, and waited. For a moment no word more was spoken. The old soldier, white and trembling strangely, reseated himself at the desk, and covered his face with his hands. Twice he drew them with feebly stroking movement over his eyes, as though to rally the stunned faculties and face the trying ordeal. Then a shiver passed through his frame, and with sudden lift of the head he fixed his gaze on Chester's face and launched the question,—

"Chester, is there any kindness to a man who has been through what I have in telling only half a tale, as you have done?"

The captain colored red. "I am at a loss to answer you, colonel," he said, after brief reflection. "You know far more than you did half an hour ago, and what I knew I could not bear to tell you as yet."

"My God! my God! Tell me *all*, and tell me at once. Here, man, if you need stimulant to your indignation and cannot speak without it, read this. I found it, open, among the rose-bushes in the garden, where she must have dropped it when out there with you. Read it. Tell me what it means; for, God knows, I can't believe such a thing of her."

He handed Chester a sheet of note-paper. It was moist and blurred on the first page, but the inner pages, though damp, were in good condition. The first, second, and third pages were closely covered in a bold, nervous hand that Chester knew well. It was Jerrold's writing, beyond a doubt, and Chester's face grew hot as he read, and his heart turned cold as stone when he finished the last hurried line.

"My Darling,—

"I *must* see you, if only for a moment, before you leave. Do not let this alarm you, for the more I think the more I am convinced it is only a bluff, but Captain Chester discovered my absence early this morning when spying around as usual, and now he claims to have knowledge of our secret. Even if he was on the terrace when I got back, it was too dark for him to recognize me, and it seems impossible that he can have got any real clue. He suspects, perhaps, and thinks to force me to confession; but I would guard your name with my life. Be wary. Act as though there were nothing on earth between us, and if we cannot meet until then I will be at the dépôt with the others to see you off, and will then have a letter ready with full particulars and instructions. It will be in the first thing I hand to you. Hide it until you can safely read it. Your mother must not be allowed a glimmer of suspicion, and then you are safe. As for me, even Chester cannot make the colonel turn against me now. My jealous one, my fiery sweetheart, do you not realize now that I was wise in showing her so much attention? A thousand kisses. Come what may, they cannot rob us of the past. Howard.

"I fear you heard and were alarmed by the shots just after I left you. All was quiet when I got home."

It was some seconds before Chester could control himself sufficiently to speak. "I wish to God the bullet had gone through his heart!" he said.

"It has gone through mine,—through mine! This will kill her mother. Chester," cried the colonel, springing suddenly to his feet, "she must not know it. She must not dream of it. I tell you it would stretch her in the dust, *dead*, for she loves that child with all her strength, with all her being, I believe, for it is two mother-loves in one. She had a son, older than Alice by several years, her first-born,—her

glory, he was,—but the boy inherited the father's passionate and impulsive nature. He loved a girl utterly beneath him, and would have married her when he was only twenty. There is no question that he loved her well, for he refused to give her up, no matter what his father threatened. They tried to buy her off, and she scorned them. Then they had a letter written, while he was sent abroad under pretence that he should have his will if he came back in a year unchanged. By Jove, it seems she was as much in love as he, and it broke her heart. She went off and died somewhere, and he came back ahead of time because her letters had ceased, and found it all out. There was an awful scene. He cursed them both,—father and mother,—and left her senseless at his feet; and from that day to this they never heard of him, never could get the faintest report. It broke Renwick,—killed him, I guess, for he died in two years; and as for the mother, you would not think that a woman so apparently full of life and health was in desperate danger. She had some organic trouble with the heart years ago, they tell her, and this experience has developed it so that now any great emotion or sudden shock is perilous. Do you not see how doubly fearful this comes to us? Chester, I have weathered one awful storm, but I'm old and broken now. This—this beats me. Tell me what to do."

The captain was silent a few moments. He was thinking intently.

"Does she know you have that letter?" he asked.

Maynard shook his head: "I looked back as I came away. She was in the parlor, singing softly to herself, at the very moment I picked it up, lying open as it was right there among the roses, the first words staring me in the face. I meant not to read it,—never dreamed it was for her,—and had turned over the page to look for the superscription. There was none, but there I saw the signature and that postscript about the shots. That startled me, and I read it here just before you came, and then could account for your conduct,—something I could not do before. God of heaven! would any man believe it of her? It is incredible! Chester, tell me everything you know now,—even everything you suspect. I must see my way clear."

And then the captain, with halting and reluctant tongue, told his story: how he had stumbled on the ladder back of the colonel's quarters and learned from Number Five that some one had been prowling back of Bachelors' Row; how he returned there afterwards, found the ladder at the side-wall, and saw the tall form issue from her window; how he had given chase and been knocked breathless, and of his suspicions, and Leary's, as to the identity of the stranger.

The colonel bowed his head still deeper, and groaned aloud. But he had still other questions to ask.

"Did you see—any one else at the window?"

"Not while he was there."

"At any time, then,—before or after?" And the colonel's eyes would take no denial.

"I saw," faltered Chester, "nobody. The shade was pulled up while I was standing there, after I had tripped on the ladder. I supposed the noise of my stumble had awakened her."

"And was that all? Did you see nothing more?"

"Colonel, I *did* see, afterwards, a woman's hand and arm closing the shade."

"My God! And she told me she slept the night through,—never waked or heard a sound!"

"Did you hear nothing yourself, colonel?"

"Nothing. When she came home from the party she stopped a moment, saying something to him at the door, then came into the library and kissed me good-night. I shut up the house and went to bed about half-past twelve, and her door was closed when I went to our room."

"So there were two closed doors, yours and hers, and the broad hall between you?"

"Certainly. We have the doors open all night that lead into the rear rooms, and their windows. This gives us abundant air. Alice always has the hall door closed at night."

"And Mrs. Maynard,—was she asleep?"

"No. Mrs. Maynard was lying awake, and seemed a little restless and disturbed. Some of the women had been giving her some hints about Jerrold and fretting her. You know she took a strange fancy to him at the start. It was simply because he reminded her so strongly of the boy she had lost. She told me so. But after a little she began to discover traits in him she did not like, and then his growing intimacy with Alice worried her. She would have put a stop to the doctor's party,—to her going with him, I mean,—but the engagement was made some days ago. Two or three days since, she warned Alice not to trust him, she says; and it is really as much on this as any other account that we decided to get her away, off to see her aunt Grace. Oh, God! how blind we are! how blind we are!" And poor old Maynard bowed his head and almost groaned aloud.

Chester rose, and, in his characteristic way, began tramping nervously up and down. There was a knock at the door. "The adjutant's compliments, and 'twas time for guard-mount. Would the colonel wish to see him before he went out?" asked the orderly.

"I ought to go, sir," said Chester. "I am old officer of the day, and there will be just time for me to get into full uniform."

"Let them go on without you," said Maynard. "I cannot spare you now. Send word to that effect. Now,—now about this man,—this Jerrold. What is the best thing we can do?—of course I know what he most deserves;—but what is the *best* thing under all the circumstances? Of course my wife and Alice will leave to-day. She was still sleeping when I left, and, pray God, is not dreaming of this. It was nearly two before she closed her eyes last night; and I, too, slept badly. You have seen him. What does he say?"

"Denies everything,—anything,—challenges me to prove that he was absent from his house more than five minutes,—indeed, I could not, for he may have come in just after I left,—and pretended utter ignorance of my meaning when I accused him of striking me before I ordered the sentry to fire. Of course it is all useless now. When I confront him with this letter he *must* give in. Then let him resign and get away as quietly as possible before the end of the week. No one

need know the causes. Of course shooting is what he deserves; but shooting demands explanation. It is better for your name, hers, and all, that he should be allowed to live than that the truth were suspected, as it would be if he were killed. Indeed, sir, if I were you I would take them to Sablon, keep them away for a fortnight, and leave him to me. It may be even judicious to let him go on with all his duties as though nothing had happened, as though he had simply been absent from reveille, and let the whole matter drop like that until all remark and curiosity is lulled; then you can send her back to Europe or the East,—time enough to decide on that; but I will privately tell him he must quit the service in six months, and show him why. It isn't the way it ought to be settled; it probably isn't the way Armitage would do it; but it is the best thing that occurs to me. One thing is certain: you and they ought to get away at once, and he should not be permitted to see her again. I can run the post a few days and explain matters after you go."

The colonel sat in wretched silence a few moments; then he arose:

"If it were not for *her* danger,—her heart,—I would never drop the matter here,—never! I would see it through to the bitter end. But you are probably right as to the prudent course to take. I'll get them away on the noon train: he thinks they do not start until later. Now I must go and face it. My God, Chester! could you look at that child and realize it? Even now, even now, sir, I believe—I believe, someway—somehow—she is innocent."

"God grant it, sir!"

And then the colonel left the office, avoiding, as has been told, a word with any man. Chester buttoned the tell-tale letter in an inner pocket, after having first folded the sheet lengthwise and then enclosed it in a long official envelope. The officers, wondering at the colonel's distraught appearance, had come thronging in, hoping for information, and then had gone, unsatisfied and disgusted, practically turned out by their crabbed senior captain. The ladies, after chatting aimlessly about the quadrangle for half an hour, had decided that Mrs. Maynard must be ill, and, while most of them awaited the result, two of their number went to the colonel's house and rang at the bell. A servant appeared: "Mrs. Maynard wasn't very well this morning, and was breakfasting in her room, and Miss Alice was with her, if the ladies would please excuse them." And so the emissaries returned unsuccessful. Then, too, as we have seen, despite his good intention of keeping matters hushed as much as possible, Chester's nervous irritability had got the better of him, and he had made damaging admissions to Wilton of the existence of a cause of worriment and perplexity, and this Wilton told without compunction. And then there was another excitement, that set all tongues wagging. Every man had heard what Chester said, that Mr. Jerrold must not quit the garrison until he had first come and seen the temporary commanding officer, and Hall had speedily carried the news to his friend.

"Are *you* ready to go?" asked Mr. Jerrold, who was lacing his boots in the rear room.

"No. I've got to go and get into 'cits' first."

"All right. Go, and be lively! I'll wait for you at Murphy's, beyond the bridge, provided you say nothing about it."

"You don't mean you are going against orders?"

"Going? Of course I am. I've got old Maynard's permission, and if Chester means to revoke it he's got to get his adjutant here inside of ten seconds. What you tell me isn't official. I'm off *now!*"

And when the adjutant returned to Captain Chester it was with the information that he was too late: Mr. Jerrold's dog-cart had crossed the bridge five minutes earlier.

Perhaps an hour later the colonel sent for Chester, and the captain went to his house. The old soldier was pacing slowly up and down the parlor floor.

"I wanted you a moment. A singular thing has happened. You know that 'Directoire' cabinet photo of Alice? My wife always kept it on her dressing-table, and this morning it's gone. That frame—the silver filigree thing—was found behind a sofa-pillow in Alice's room, and she declares she has no idea how it got there. Chester, is there any new significance in this?"

The captain bowed assent.

"What is it?"

"That photograph was seen by Major Sloat in Jerrold's bureau-drawer at reveille this morning."

And such was the situation at Sibley the August day the colonel took his wife and her lovely daughter to visit Aunt Grace at Lake Sablon.

VIII.

In the big red omnibus that was slowly toiling over the dusty road several passengers were making their way from the railway-station to the hotel at Lake Sablon. Two of them were women of mature years, whose dress and bearing betokened lives of ease and comfort; another was a lovely brunette of less than twenty, the daughter, evidently, of one of these ladies, and an object of loving pride to both. These three seemed at home in their surroundings, and were absorbed in the packet of letters and papers they had just received at the station. It was evident that they were not new arrivals, as were the other passengers, who studied them with the half-envious feelings with which new-comers at a summer resort are apt to regard those who seem to have been long established there, and who gathered from the scraps of conversation that they had merely been over to say good-by to friends leaving on the very train which brought in the rest of what we good Americans term "the 'bus-load." There were women among the newly-arrived who inspected the dark girl with that calm, unflinching, impertinent scrutiny and half-audibly whispered comment which, had they been of the opposite sex, would have warranted their being kicked out of the conveyance, but which was ignored by the fair object and her friends as completely as were the commentators themselves. There were one or two men in the omnibus who might readily have been forgiven an admiring glance or two at so bright a vision of girlish beauty as was Miss Renwick this August afternoon, and they *had* looked; but the one who most attracted

the notice of Mrs. Maynard and Aunt Grace—a tall, stalwart, distinguished-looking party in gray travelling-dress—had taken his seat close to the door and was deep in the morning's paper before they were fairly away from the station.

Laying down the letter she had just finished reading, Mrs. Maynard glanced at her daughter, who was still engaged in one of her own, and evidently with deep interest.

"From Fort Sibley, Alice?"

"Yes, mamma, all three,—Miss Craven, Mrs. Hoyt, and—Mr. Jerrold. Would you like to see it?" And, with rising color, she held forth the one in her hand.

"Not now," was the answer, with a smile that told of confidence and gratification both. "It is about the german, I suppose?"

"Yes. He thinks it outrageous that we should not be there,—says it is to be the prettiest ever given at the fort, and that Mrs. Hoyt and Mrs. Craven, who are the managers for the ladies, had asked him to lead. He wants to know if we cannot possibly come."

"Are you not very eager to go, Alice? I should be," said Aunt Grace, with sympathetic interest.

"Yes, I am," answered Miss Renwick, reflectively. "It had been arranged that it should come off next week, when, as was supposed, we would be home after this visit. It cannot be postponed, of course, because it is given in honor of all the officers who are gathered there for the rifle-competition, and that will be all over and done with to-day, and they cannot stay beyond Tuesday next. We must give it up, auntie," and she looked up smilingly, "and you have made it so lovely for me here that I can do it without a sigh. Think of that!—an army german!—and Fanny Craven says the favors are to be simply lovely. Yes, I *did* want to go, but papa said he felt unequal to it the moment he got back from Chicago, day before yesterday, and he certainly does not look at all well: so that ended it, and I wrote at once to Mrs. Hoyt. This is her answer now."

"What does she say?"

"Oh, it is very kind of her: she wants me to come and be her guest if the colonel is too ill to come and mamma will not leave him. She says Mr. Hoyt will come down and escort me. But I would not like to go without mamma," and the big dark eyes looked up wistfully, "and I know she does not care to urge papa when he seems so indisposed to going."

Mrs. Maynard's eyes were anxious and troubled now. She turned to her sister-in-law:

"Do you think he seems any better, Grace? I do not."

"It is hard to say. He was so nervously anxious to get away to see the general the very day you arrived here that there was not a moment in which I could ask him about himself; and since his return he has avoided all mention of it beyond saying it is nothing but indigestion and he would be all right in a few days. I never knew him to suffer in that way in my life. Is there any regimental matter that can be troubling him?" she asked, in lower tone.

"Nothing of any consequence whatever. Of course the officers

feel chagrined over their defeat in the rifle-match. They had expected to stand very high, but Mr. Jerrold's shooting was unexpectedly below the average, and it threw their team behind. But the colonel didn't make the faintest allusion to it. That hasn't worried him anywhere near as much as it has the others, I should judge."

"I do not think it was all Mr. Jerrold's fault, mamma," said Miss Renwick, with gentle reproach and a very becoming flush. "I'm going to stand up for him, because I think they all blame him for other men's poor work. He was not the only one on our team whose shooting was below former scores."

"They claim that none fell so far below their expectations as he, Alice. You know I am no judge of such matters, but Mr. Hoyt and Captain Gray both write the colonel that Mr. Jerrold had been taking no care of himself whatever and was entirely out of form."

"In any event I'm glad the cavalry did no better," was Miss Renwick's loyal response. "You remember the evening we rode out to the range and Captain Gray said that there was the man who would win the first prize from Mr. Jerrold,—that tall cavalry sergeant who fainted away,—Sergeant McLeod; don't you remember, mother? Well, he did not even get a place, and Mr. Jerrold beat him easily."

Something in her mother's eyes warned her to be guarded, and, in that indefinable but unerring system of feminine telegraphy, called her attention to the man sitting by the door. Looking quickly to her right, Miss Renwick saw that he was intently regarding her. At the mention of Fort Sibley the stranger had lowered his paper, revealing a bronzed face clean-shaven except for the thick blonde moustache, and a pair of clear, steady, searching blue eyes under heavy brows and lashes, and these eyes were very deliberately yet respectfully fixed upon her own; nor were they withdrawn in proper confusion when detected. It was Miss Renwick whose eyes gave up the contest and returned in some sense of defeat to her mother's face.

"What letters have you for the colonel?" asked Mrs. Maynard, coming *au secours*.

"Three,—two of them from his devoted henchman Captain Chester, who writes by every mail, I should imagine; and these he will go off into some secluded nook with and come back looking blue and worried. Then here's another, forwarded from Sibley, too. I do not know this hand. Perhaps it is from Captain Armitage, who, they say, is to come back next month. Poor Mr. Jerrold!"

"Why poor Mr. Jerrold?" asked Aunt Grace, with laughing interest, as she noted the expression on her niece's pretty face.

"Because he can't bear Captain Armitage, and——"

"Now, Alice!" said her mother, reprovingly. "You must not take his view of the captain at all. Remember what the colonel said of him——"

"Mother dear," protested Alice, laughing, "I have no doubt Captain Armitage is the paragon of a soldier, but he is unquestionably a most unpleasant and ungentlemanly person in his conduct to the young officers. Mr. Hall has told me the same thing. I declare, I don't see how they can speak to him at all, he has been so harsh and discourteous

and unjust." The color was rising in earnest now, but a warning glance in her mother's eye seemed to check further words. There was an instant's silence. Then Aunt Grace remarked,—

"Alice, your next-door neighbor has vanished. I think your vehemence has frightened him."

Surely enough, the big, blue-eyed man in tweeds had disappeared. During this brief controversy he had quickly and noiselessly let himself out of the open door, swung lightly to the ground, and was out of sight among the trees.

"Why, what a strange proceeding!" said Aunt Grace again. "We are fully a mile and a half from the hotel, and he means to walk it in this glaring sun."

Evidently he did. The driver reined up at the moment in response to a suggestion from some one in a forward seat, and there suddenly appeared by the wayside, striding out from the shelter of the sumachs, the athletic figure of the stranger.

"Go ahead!" he called, in a deep chest-voice that had an unmistakable ring to it,—the tone that one so readily recognizes in men accustomed to prompt action and command. "I'm going across lots." And, swinging his heavy stick, with quick, elastic steps and erect carriage the man in gray plunged into a wood-path and was gone.

"Alice," said Aunt Grace, again, "that man is an officer, I'm sure, and you have driven him into exile and lonely wandering. I've seen so much of them when visiting my brother in the old days before my marriage that even in civilian dress it is easy to tell some of them. Just look at that back, and those shoulders! He has been a soldier all his life. Horrors! suppose it should be Captain Armitage himself!"

Miss Renwick looked genuinely distressed, as well as vexed. Certainly no officer but Captain Armitage would have had reason to leave the stage. Certainly officers and their families occasionally visited Sablon in the summer-time, but Captain Armitage could hardly be here. There was comforting assurance in the very note she held in her hand.

"It cannot be," she said, "because Mr. Jerrold writes that they have just heard from him at Sibley. He is still at the sea-shore, and will not return for a month. Mr. Jerrold says he implored Captain Chester to let him have three days' leave to come down here and have a sail and a picnic with us, and was told that it would be out of the question."

"Did he tell you any other news?" asked Mrs. Maynard, looking up from her letter again,—"anything about the german?"

"He says he thinks it a shame we are to be away and—well, read it yourself." And she placed it in her mother's hands, the dark eyes seriously, anxiously studying her face as she read. Presently Mrs. Maynard laid it down and looked again into her own, then, pointing to a certain passage with her finger, handed it to her daughter.

"Men were deceivers ever," she said, laughing, yet oracularly significant.

And Alice Renwick could not quite control the start with which she read,—

"Mr. Jerrold is to lead with his old love, Nina Beaubien. They make a capital pair, and she, of course, will be radiant—with Alice out of the way."

"That is something Mr. Jerrold failed to mention, is it not?"

Miss Renwick's cheeks were flushed, and the dark eyes were filled with sudden pain, as she answered,—

"I did not know she was there. She was to have gone to the Lakes the same day we left."

"She did go, Alice," said her mother, quietly, "but it was only for a brief visit, it seems."

The colonel was not at their cottage when the omnibus reached the lake. Over at the hotel were the usual number of loungers gathered to see the new arrivals, and Alice presently caught sight of the colonel coming through the park. If anything, he looked more listless and dispirited than he had before they left. She ran down the steps to meet him, smiling brightly up into his worn and haggard face.

"Are you feeling a little brighter, papa? Here are letters for you."

He took them wearily, barely glancing at the superscriptions.

"I had hoped for something more," he said, and passed on into the little frame house which was his sister's summer home. "Is your mother here?" he asked, looking back as he entered the door.

"In the north room, with Aunt Grace, papa," she answered; and then once more and with graver face she began to read Mr. Jerrold's letter. It was a careful study she was making of it this time, and not altogether a pleasant one. Aunt Grace came out and made some laughing remark at seeing her still so occupied. She looked up, pluckily smiling despite a sense of wounded pride, and answered,—

"I am only convincing myself that it was purely on general principles that Mr. Jerrold seemed so anxious I should be there. He never wanted me to lead with him at all." All the same it stung, and Aunt Grace saw and knew it, and longed to take her to her heart and comfort her; but it was better so. She was finding him out unaided.

She was still studying over portions of that ingenious letter, when the rustle of her aunt's gown indicated that she was rising. She saw her move towards the steps, heard a quick, firm tread upon the narrow planking, and glanced up in surprise. There, uncovering his close-cropped head, stood the tall stranger, looking placidly up as he addressed Aunt Grace:

"Pardon me, can I see Colonel Maynard?"

"He is at home. Pray come up and take a chair. I will let him know. I—I felt sure you must be some friend of his when I saw you in the stage," said the good lady, with manifest and apologetic uneasiness.

"Yes," responded the stranger, as he quickly ascended the steps and bowed before her, smiling quietly the while. "Let me introduce myself. I am Captain Armitage, of the colonel's regiment."

"There! I *knew* it!" was Aunt Grace's response, as with both hands uplifted in tragic despair she gave one horror-stricken glance at Alice and rushed into the house.

There was a moment's silence; then, with burning cheeks, but

with brave eyes that looked frankly into his, Alice Renwick arose, came straight up to him, and held out her pretty hand.

"Captain Armitage, I beg your pardon."

He took the extended hand and gazed earnestly into her face, while a kind—almost merry—smile lighted up his own.

"Have the boys given me such an uncanny reputation as all that?" he asked; and then, as though tickled with the comicality of the situation, he began to laugh. "What ogres some of us old soldiers do become in the course of years! Do you know, young lady, I might never have suspected what a brute I was if it had not been for you? What a blessed thing it was the colonel did not tell you I was coming! You would never have given me this true insight into my character."

But she saw nothing to laugh at, and would not laugh. Her lovely face was still burning with blushes and dismay and full of trouble.

"I do not look upon it lightly at all," she said. "It was unpardonable in me to—to——"

"To take so effective and convincing a method of telling a man of his grievous sins! Not a bit of it. I like a girl who has the courage to stand up for her friends. I shall congratulate Jerrold and Hall both when I get back, lucky fellows that they are!" And evidently Captain Armitage was deriving altogether too much jolly entertainment from her awkwardness. She rallied and strove to put an end to it.

"Indeed, Captain Armitage, I *do* think the young officers sorely need friends and advocates at times. I never would have knowingly spoken to you of your personal responsibilities in the woes of Mr. Jerrold and Mr. Hall, but since I have done so unwittingly I may as well define my position, especially as you are so good-natured with it all." And here, it must be admitted, Miss Renwick's beautiful eyes were shyly lifted to his in a most telling way. Once there, they looked squarely into the clear blue depths of his, and never flinched. "It seemed to me several times at Sibley that the young officers deserved more consideration and courtesy than their captains accorded them. It was not you alone that I heard of."

"I am profoundly gratified to learn that somebody else is a brute," he answered, trying to look grave, but with that irrepressible merriment twitching at the corners of his mouth and giving sudden gleams of his firm white teeth through the thick moustache. "You are come to us just in time, Miss Renwick, and if you will let me come and tell you all my sorrows the next time the colonel pitches into me for something wrong in B Company, I'll give you full permission to overhaul me for everything or anything I say and do to the youngsters. Is it a bargain?" And he held out his big, firm hand.

"I think you are—very different from what I heard," was all her answer, as she looked up in his eyes, twinkling as they were with fun. "Oh, we are to shake hands on it as a bargain? Is that it? Very well, then."

IX.

When Captain Armitage left the cottage that night he did not go at once to his own room. Brief as was the conversation he had enjoyed

with Miss Renwick, it was all that Fate vouchsafed him for that date at least. The entire party went to tea together at the hotel, but immediately thereafter the colonel carried Armitage away, and for two long hours they were closeted over some letters that had come from Sibley, and when the conference broke up and the wondering ladies saw the two men come forth it was late,—almost ten o'clock,—and the captain did not venture beyond the threshold of the sitting-room. He bowed and bade them a somewhat ceremonious good-night. His eyes rested—lingered—on Miss Renwick's uplifted face, and it was the picture he took with him into the stillness of the summer night.

The colonel accompanied him to the steps, and rested his hand upon the broad gray shoulder.

"God only knows how I have needed you, Armitage. This trouble has nearly crushed me, and it seemed as though I were utterly alone. I had the haunting fear that it was only weakness on my part and my love for my wife that made me stand out against Chester's propositions. He can only see guilt and conviction in every new phase of the case, and, though you see how he tries to spare me, his letters give no hope of any other conclusion."

Armitage pondered a moment before he answered. Then he slowly spoke:

"Chester has lived a lonely and an unhappy life. His first experience after graduation was that wretched affair of which you have told me. Of course I knew much of the particulars before, but not all. I respect Chester as a soldier and a gentleman, and I like him and trust him as a friend; but, Colonel Maynard, in a matter of such vital importance as this, and one of such delicacy, I distrust, not his motives, but his judgment. All his life, practically, he has been brooding over the sorrow that came to him when your trouble came to you, and his mind is grooved: he believes he sees mystery and intrigue in matters that others might explain in an instant."

"But think of all the array of evidence he has."

"Enough, and more than enough, I admit, to warrant everything he has thought or said of the man; but——"

"He simply puts it this way. If he be guilty, can she be less? Is it possible, Armitage, that you are unconvinced?"

"Certainly I am unconvinced. The matter has not yet been sifted. As I understand it, you have forbidden his confronting Jerrold with the proofs of his rascality until I get there. Admitting the evidence of the ladder, the picture, and the form at the window,—ay, the letter, too,—I am yet to be convinced of one thing. You must remember that his judgment is biassed by his early experiences. He fancies that no woman is proof against such fascinations as Jerrold's."

"And your belief?"

"Is that some women—*many* women—are utterly above such a possibility."

Old Maynard wrung his comrade's hand. "You make me hope in spite of myself,—my past experiences,—my very senses, Armitage. I have leaned on you so many years that I missed you sorely when this trial came. If you had been there, things might not have taken

this shape. He looks upon Chester—and it's one thing Chester hasn't forgiven in him—as a meddling old granny; you remember the time he so spoke of him last year; but he holds you in respect, or is afraid of you,—which in a man of his calibre is about the same thing. It may not be too late for you to act. Then when he is disposed of once and for all, I can know what must be done—where she is concerned."

"And under no circumstances can you question Mrs. Maynard?"

"No! no! If she suspected anything of this it would kill her. In any event, she must have no suspicion of it *now*."

"But does she not ask? Has she no theory about the missing photograph? Surely she must marvel over its disappearance."

"She *does;* at least, she *did;* but—I'm ashamed to own it, Armitage—we had to quiet her natural suspicions in some way, and I told her that it was my doing,—that I took it to tease Alice, put the photograph in the drawer of my desk, and hid the frame behind her sofa-pillow. Chester knows of the arrangement, and we had settled that when the picture was recovered from Mr. Jerrold he would send it to me."

Armitage was silent. A frown settled on his forehead, and it was evident that the statement was far from welcome to him. Presently he held forth his hand.

"Well, good-night, sir. I must go and have a quiet think over this. I hope you will rest well. You need it, colonel."

But Maynard only shook his head. His heart was too troubled for rest of any kind. He stood gazing out towards the park, where the tall figure of his ex-adjutant had disappeared among the trees. He heard the low-toned, pleasant chat of the ladies in the sitting-room, but he was in no mood to join them. He wished that Armitage had not gone, he felt such strength and comparative hope in his presence; but it was plain that even Armitage was confounded by the array of facts and circumstances that he had so painfully and slowly communicated to him. The colonel went drearily back to the room in which they had had their long conference. His wife and sister both hailed him as he passed the sitting-room door, and urged him to come and join them,—they wanted to ask about Captain Armitage, with whom it was evident they were much impressed; but he answered that he had some letters to put away, and he must attend first to that.

Among those that had been shown to the captain, mainly letters from Chester telling of the daily events at the fort and of his surveillance in the case of Jerrold, was one which Alice had brought him two days before. This had seemed to him of unusual importance, as the others contained nothing that tended to throw new light on the case. It said,—

"I am glad you have telegraphed for Armitage, and heartily approve your decision to lay the whole case before him. I presume he can reach you by Sunday, and that by Tuesday he will be here at the fort and ready to act. This will be a great relief to me, for, do what I could to allay it, there is no concealing the fact that much speculation and gossip is afloat concerning the events of that unhappy night. Leary declares he has been close-mouthed; the other men on guard know absolutely nothing, and Captain Wilton is the only officer to

whom in my distress of mind I betrayed that there *was* a mystery, and he has pledged himself to me to say nothing. Sloat, too, has an inkling, and a big one, that Jerrold is the suspected party; but I never dreamed that anything had been seen or heard which in the faintest way connected *your* household with the matter, until yesterday. Then Leary admitted to me that two women, Mrs. Clifford's cook and the doctor's nursery-maid, had asked him whether it wasn't Lieutenant Jerrold he fired at, and if it was true that he was trying to get in at the colonel's back door. Twice Mrs. Clifford has asked me very significant questions, and three times to-day have officers made remarks to me that indicated their knowledge of the existence of some grave trouble. What makes matters worse is that Jerrold, when twitted about his absence from reveille, loses his temper and gets confused. There came near being a quarrel between him and Rollins at the mess a day or two since. He was saying that the reason he slept through roll-call was the fact that he had been kept up very late at the doctor's party, and Rollins happened to come in at the moment and blurted out that if he was up at all it must have been after he left the party, and reminded him that he had left before midnight with Miss Renwick. This completely staggered Jerrold, who grew confused and tried to cover it with a display of anger. Now, two weeks ago Rollins was most friendly to Jerrold and stood up for him when I assailed him, but ever since that night he has had no word to say for him. When Jerrold played wrathful and accused Rollins of mixing in other men's business, Rollins bounced up to him like a young bull-terrier, and I believe there would have been a row had not Sloat and Hoyt promptly interfered. Jerrold apologized, and Rollins accepted the apology, but has avoided him ever since,—won't speak of him to me, now that I have reason to want to draw him out. As soon as Armitage gets here he can do what I cannot,—find out just what and who is suspected and talked about.

"Mr. Jerrold, of course, avoids me. He has been attending strictly to his duty, and is evidently confounded that I did not press the matter of his going to town as he did the day I forbade it. Mr. Hoyt's being too late to see him personally gave me sufficient grounds on which to excuse it; but he seems to understand that something is impending, and is looking nervous and harassed. He has not renewed his request for leave of absence to run down to Sablon. I told him curtly it was out of the question."

The colonel took a few strides up and down the room. It had come, then. The good name of those he loved was already besmirched by garrison gossip, and he knew that nothing but heroic measures could ever silence scandal. Impulse and the innate sense of "fight" urged him to go at once to the scene, leaving his wife and her fair daughter here under his sister's roof; but Armitage and common sense said no. He had placed his burden on those broad gray shoulders, and, though ill content to wait, he felt that he was bound. Stowing away the letters, too nervous to sleep, too worried to talk, he stole from the cottage, and, with hands clasped behind his back, with low-bowed head he strolled forth into the broad vista of moonlit road.

There were bright lights still burning at the hotel, and gay voices came floating through the summer air. The piano, too, was thrumming a waltz in the parlor, and two or three couples were throwing embracing, slowly-twirling shadows on the windows. Over in the bar- and billiard-rooms the click of the balls and the refreshing rattle of cracked ice told suggestively of the occupation of the inmates. Keeping on beyond these distracting sounds, he slowly climbed a long, gradual ascent to the "bench," or plateau above the wooded point on which were grouped the glistening white buildings of the pretty summer resort, and, having reached the crest, turned silently to gaze at the beauty of the scene,—at the broad, flawless bosom of a summer lake all sheen and silver from the unclouded moon. Far to the southeast it wound among the bold and rock-ribbed bluffs rising from the forest growth at their base to shorn and rounded summits. Miles away to the southward twinkled the lights of one busy little town; others gleamed and sparkled over towards the northern shore, close under the pole-star; while directly opposite frowned a massive wall of palisaded rock, that threw, deep and heavy and far from shore, its long reflection in the mirror of water. There was not a breath of air stirring in the heavens, not a ripple on the face of the waters beneath, save where, close under the bold headland down on the other side, the signal-lights, white and crimson and green, creeping slowly along in the shadows, revealed one of the packets ploughing her steady way to the great marts below. Nearer at hand, just shaving the long strip of sandy, wooded point that jutted far out into the lake, a broad raft of timber, pushed by a hard-working, black-funnelled stern-wheeler, was slowly forging its way to the outlet of the lake, its shadowy edge sprinkled here and there with little sparks of lurid red,—the pilot-lights that gave warning of its slow and silent coming. Far down along the southern shore, under that black bluff-line, close to the silver water-edge, a glowing meteor seemed whirling through the night, and the low, distant rumble told of the "Atlantic Express" thundering on its journey. Here, along with him on the level plateau, were other roomy cottages, some dark, some still sending forth a guiding ray; while long lines of white-washed fence gleamed ghostly in the moonlight and were finally lost in the shadow of the great bluff that abruptly shut in the entire point and plateau and shut out all further sight of lake or land in that direction. Far beneath he could hear the soft plash upon the sandy shore of the little wavelets that came sweeping in the wake of the raft-boat and spending their tiny strength upon the strand; far down on the hotel point he could still hear the soft melody of the waltz; he remembered how the band used to play that same air, and wondered why it was he used to like it; it jarred him now. Presently the distant crack of a whip and the low rumble of wheels were heard: the omnibus coming back from the station with passengers from the night train. He was in no mood to see any one. He turned away and walked northward along the edge of the bench, towards the deep shadow of the great shoulder of the bluff, and presently he came to a long flight of wooden stairs, leading from the plateau down to the hotel, and here he stopped and seated himself awhile. He did not want to go home

yet. He wanted to be by himself,—to think and brood over his trouble. He saw the omnibus go round the bend and roll up to the hotel door-way with its load of pleasure-seekers, and heard the joyous welcome with which some of their number were received by waiting friends, but life had little of joy to him this night. He longed to go away,—anywhere, anywhere, could he only leave this haunting misery behind. He was so proud of his regiment; he had been so happy in bringing home to it his accomplished and gracious wife; he had been so joyous in planning for the lovely times Alice was to have,—the social successes, the girlish triumphs, the garrison gayeties of which she was to be the queen,—and now, so very, very soon, all had turned to ashes and desolation! She *was* so beautiful, so sweet, winning, graceful. Oh, God! *could* it be that one so gifted could possibly be so base? He rose in nervous misery and clinched his hands high in air, then sat down again with hiding, hopeless face, rocking to and fro as sways a man in mortal pain. It was long before he rallied and again wearily arose. Most of the lights were gone; silence had settled down upon the sleeping point; he was chilled with the night air and the dew, and stiff and heavy as he tried to walk. Down at the foot of the stairs he could see the night-watchman making his rounds. He did not want to explain matters and talk with him: he would go around. There was a steep pathway down into the ravine that gave into the lake just beyond his sister's cottage, and this he sought and followed, moving slowly and painfully, but finally reaching the grassy level of the pathway that connected the cottages with the wood-road up the bluff. Trees and shrubbery were thick on both sides, and the path was shaded. He turned to his right, and came down until once more he was in sight of the white walls of the hotel standing out there on the point, until close at hand he could see the light of his own cottage glimmering like faithful beacon through the trees; and then he stopped short.

A tall, slender figure—a man in dark, snug-fitting clothing—was creeping stealthily up to the cottage window.

The colonel held his breath: his heart thumped violently: he waited,—watched. He saw the dark figure reach the blinds; he saw them slowly, softly turned, and the faint light gleaming from within; he saw the figure peering in between the slats, and then—God! was it possible?—a low voice, a man's voice, whispering or hoarsely murmuring a name: he heard a sudden movement within the room, as though the occupant had heard and were replying, "Coming." His blood froze: it was not Alice's room: it was his,—his and hers—his wife's,—and that was surely her step approaching the window. Yes, the blind was quickly opened. A white-robed figure stood at the casement. He could see, hear, bear no more: with one mad rush he sprang from his lair and hurled himself upon the shadowy stranger.

"You hound! who are you?"

But 'twas no shadow that he grasped. A muscular arm was round him in a trice, a brawny hand at his throat, a twisting, sinewy leg was curled in his, and he went reeling back upon the springy turf, stunned and wellnigh breathless.

When he could regain his feet and reach the casement the stranger had vanished; but Mrs. Maynard lay there on the floor within, a white and senseless heap.

X.

Perhaps it was as well for all parties that Frank Armitage concluded that he must have another whiff of tobacco that night as an incentive to the "think" he had promised himself. He had strolled through the park to the grove of trees out on the point and seated himself in the shadows. Here his reflections were speedily interrupted by the animated flirtations of a few couples who, tiring of the dance, came out into the coolness of the night and the seclusion of the grove, where their murmured words and soft laughter soon gave the captain's nerves a strain they could not bear. He broke cover and betook himself to the very edge of the stone retaining wall out on the point.

He wanted to think calmly and dispassionately; he meant to weigh all he had read and heard and form his estimate of the gravity of the case before going to bed. He meant to be impartial,—to judge her as he would judge any other woman so compromised; but for the life of him he could not. He bore with him the mute image of her lovely face, with its clear, truthful, trustful dark eyes. He saw her as she stood before him on the little porch when they shook hands on their laughing—or his laughing—compact, for she would not laugh. How perfect she was!—her radiant beauty, her uplifted eyes, so full of their self-reproach and regret at the speech she had made at his expense! How exquisite was the grace of her slender, rounded form as she stood there before him, one slim hand half shyly extended to meet the cordial clasp of his own! He wanted to judge and be just; but that image dismayed him. How could he look on this picture and then—on that,—the one portrayed in the chain of circumstantial evidence which the colonel had laid before him? It was monstrous! it was treason to womanhood! One look in her eyes, superb in their innocence, was too much for his determined impartiality. Armitage gave himself a mental kick for what he termed his imbecility, and went back to the hotel.

"It's no use," he muttered. "I'm a slave of the weed, and can't be philosophic without my pipe."

Up to his little box of a room he climbed, found his pipe-case and tobacco-pouch, and in five minutes was strolling out to the point once more, when he came suddenly upon the night-watchman,—a personage of whose functions and authority he was entirely ignorant. The man eyed him narrowly, and essayed to speak. Not knowing him, and desiring to be alone, Armitage pushed past, and was surprised to find that a hand was on his shoulder and the man at his side before he had gone a rod.

"Beg pardon, sir," said the watchman, gruffly, "but I don't know you. Are you stopping at the hotel?"

"I am," said Armitage, coolly, taking his pipe from his lips and blowing a cloud over his other shoulder. "And who may you be?"

"I am the watchman; and I do not remember seeing you come to-day."

"Nevertheless I did."

"On what train, sir?"

"This afternoon's up-train."

"You certainly were not on the omnibus when it got here."

"Very true. I walked over from beyond the school-house."

"You must excuse me, sir. I did not think of that; and the manager requires me to know everybody. Is this Major Armitage?"

"Armitage is my name, but I'm not a major."

"Yes, sir; I'm glad to be set right. And the other gentleman,—him as was inquiring for Colonel Maynard to-night? He's in the army, too, but his name don't seem to be on the book. He only came in on the late train."

"Another man to see Colonel Maynard?" asked the captain, with sudden interest. "Just come in, you say. I'm sure I've no idea. What was he like?"

"I don't know, sir. At first I thought you was him. The driver told me he brought a gentleman over who asked some questions about Colonel Maynard, but he didn't get aboard at the dépôt, and he didn't come down to the hotel,—got off somewhere up there on the bench, and Jim didn't see him."

"Where's Jim?" said Armitage. "Come with me, watchman. I want to interview him."

Together they walked over to the barn, which the driver was just locking up after making everything secure for the night.

"Who was it inquiring for Colonel Maynard?" asked Armitage.

"I don't know, sir," was the slow answer. "There was a man got aboard as I was coming across the common there in the village at the station. There were several passengers from the train, and some baggage: so he may have started ahead on foot but afterwards concluded to ride. As soon as I saw him get in I reined up and asked where he was going; he had no baggage nor nuthin', and my orders are not to haul anybody except people of the hotel: so he came right forward through the 'bus and took the seat behind me and said 'twas all right, he was going to the hotel; and he passed up a half-dollar. I told him that I couldn't take the money,—that 'bus-fares were paid at the office,—and drove ahead. Then he handed me a cigar, and pretty soon he asked me if there were many people, and who had the cottages; and when I told him, he asked which was Colonel Maynard's, but he didn't say he knew him, and the next thing I knew was when we got here to the hotel he wasn't in the 'bus. He must have stepped back through all those passengers and slipped off up there on the bench. He was in it when we passed the little brown church up on the hill."

"What was he like?"

"I couldn't see him plain. He stepped out from behind a tree as we drove through the common, and came right into the 'bus. It was dark in there, and all I know is he was tall and had on dark clothes. Some of the people inside must have seen him better; but they are all gone to bed, I suppose."

"I will go over to the hotel and inquire, anyway," said Armitage, and did so. The lights were turned down, and no one was there, but he

could hear voices chatting in quiet tones on the broad, sheltered veranda without, and, going thither, found three or four men enjoying a quiet smoke. Armitage was a man of action. He stepped at once to the group:

"Pardon me, gentlemen, but did any of you come over in the omnibus from the station to-night?"

"I did, sir," replied one of the party, removing his cigar and twitching off the ashes with his little finger, then looking up with the air of a man expectant of question.

"The watchman tells me a man came over who was making inquiries for Colonel Maynard. May I ask if you saw or heard of such a person?"

"A gentleman got in soon after we left the station, and when the driver hailed him he went forward and took a seat near him. They had some conversation, but I did not hear it. I only know that he got out again a little while before we reached the hotel."

"Could you see him, and describe him? I am a friend of Colonel Maynard's, an officer of his regiment,—which will account for my inquiry."

"Well, yes, sir. I noticed he was very tall and slim, was dressed in dark clothes, and wore a dark slouched hat well down over his forehead. He was what I would call a military-looking man, for I noticed his walk as he got off; but he wore big spectacles,—blue or brown glass, I should say,—and had a heavy beard."

"Which way did he go when he left the 'bus?"

"He walked northward along the road at the edge of the bluff, right up towards the cottages on the upper level," was the answer.

Armitage thanked him for his courtesy, explained that he had left the colonel only a short time before and that he was then expecting no visitor, and if one had come it was perhaps necessary that he should be hunted up and brought to the hotel. Then he left the porch and walked hurriedly through the park towards its northernmost limit. There to his left stood the broad roadway along which, nestling under shelter of the bluff, was ranged the line of cottages, some two-storied, with balconies and verandas, others low, single-storied affairs with a broad hall-way in the middle of each and rooms on both north and south sides. Farthermost north on the row, almost hidden in the trees, and nearest the ravine, stood Aunt Grace's cottage, where were domiciled the colonel's household. It was in the big bay-windowed north room that he and the colonel had had their long conference earlier in the evening. The south room, nearly opposite, was used as their parlor and sitting-room. Aunt Grace and Miss Renwick slept in the little front rooms north and south of the hall-way, and the lights in their rooms were extinguished; so, too, was that in the parlor. All was darkness on the south and east. All was silence and peace as Armitage approached; but just as he reached the shadow of the stunted oak-tree growing in front of the house his ears were startled by an agonized cry, a woman's half-stifled shriek. He bounded up the steps, seized the knob of the door and threw his weight against it. It was firmly bolted within. Loud he thundered on the panels. "'Tis I,—Armi-

tage!" he called. He heard the quick patter of little feet; the bolt was slid, and he rushed in, almost stumbling against a trembling, terror-stricken, yet welcoming white-robed form,—Alice Renwick, barefooted, with her glorious wealth of hair tumbling in dark luxuriance all down over the dainty night-dress,—Alice Renwick, with pallid face and wild imploring eyes.

"What is wrong?" he asked, in haste.

"It's mother,—her room,—and it's locked, and she won't answer," was the gasping reply.

Armitage sprang to the rear of the hall, leaned one second against the opposite wall, sent his foot with mighty impulse and muscled impact against the opposing lock, and the door flew open with a crash. The next instant Alice was bending over her senseless mother, and the captain was giving a hand in much bewilderment to the panting colonel, who was striving to clamber in at the window. The ministrations of Aunt Grace and Alice were speedily sufficient to restore Mrs. Maynard. A teaspoonful of brandy administered by the colonel's trembling hand helped matters materially. Then he turned to Armitage.

"Come outside," he said.

Once again in the moonlight the two men faced each other.

"Armitage, can you get a horse?"

"Certainly. What then?"

"Go to the station, get men, if possible, and head this fellow off. He was here again to-night, and it was not Alice he called, but my—but Mrs. Maynard. I saw him; I grappled with him right here at the bay-window where *she* met him, and he hurled me to grass as though I'd been a child. *I* want a horse! I want that man to-night. How did he get away from Sibley?"

"Do you mean—do you think it was Jerrold?"

"Good God, yes! Who else could it be? Disguised, of course, and bearded; but the figure, the carriage, were just the same, and he came to this window,—to *her* window,—and called, and she answered. My God, Armitage, think of it!"

"Come with me, colonel. You are all unstrung," was the captain's answer as he led his broken friend away. At the front door he stopped one moment, then ran up the steps and into the hall, where he tapped lightly at the casement.

"What is it?" was the low response from an invisible source.

"Miss Alice?"

"Yes."

"The watchman is here now. I will send him around to the window to keep guard until our return. The colonel is a little upset by the shock, and I want to attend to him. We are going to the hotel a moment before I bring him home. You are not afraid to have him leave you?"

"Not now, captain."

"Is Mrs. Maynard better?"

"Yes. She hardly seems to know what has happened. Indeed, none of us do. What was it?"

"A tramp, looking for something to eat, tried to open the blinds,

and the colonel was out here and made a jump at him. They had a scuffle in the shrubbery, and the tramp got away. It frightened your mother: that's the sum of it, I think."

"Is papa hurt?"

"No: a little bruised and shaken, and mad as a hornet. I think perhaps I'll get him quieted down and sleepy in a few minutes, if you and Mrs. Maynard will be content to let him stay with me. I can talk almost any man drowsy."

"Mamma seems to worry for fear he is hurt."

"Assure her solemnly that he hasn't a scratch. He is simply fighting mad, and I'm going to try and find the tramp. Does Mrs. Maynard remember how he looked?"

"She could not see the face at all. She heard some one at the shutters, and a voice, and supposed of course it was papa, and threw open the blind."

"Oh, I see. That's all, Miss Alice. I'll go back to the colonel. Good-night!" And Armitage went forth with a lighter step.

"One sensation knocked endwise, colonel. I have it on the best of authority that Mrs. Maynard so fearlessly went to the window in answer to the voice and noise at the shutters simply because she knew you were out there somewhere and she supposed it was you. How simple these mysteries become when a little daylight is let in on them, after all! Come, I'm going to take you over to my room for a stiff glass of grog, and then after his trampship while you go back to bed."

"Armitage, you seem to make very light of this night's doings. What is easier than to connect it all with the trouble at Sibley?"

"Nothing was ever more easily explained than this thing, colonel, and all I want now is a chance to get that tramp. Then I'll go to Sibley; and 'pon my word I believe that mystery can be made as commonplace a piece of petty larceny as this was of vagrancy. Come."

But when Armitage left the colonel at a later hour and sought his own room for a brief rest he was in no such buoyant mood. A night-search for a tramp in the dense thickets among the bluffs and woods of Sablon could hardly be successful. It was useless to make the attempt. He slept but little during the cool August night, and early in the morning mounted a horse and trotted over to the railway-station.

"Has any train gone northward since last night?" he inquired at the office.

"None that stop here," was the answer. "The first train up comes along at 11.56."

"I want to send a despatch to Fort Sibley and get an answer without delay. Can you work it for me?"

The agent nodded, and pushed over a package of blanks. Armitage wrote rapidly as follows:

"CAPTAIN CHESTER,

"Commanding Fort Sibley.

"Is Jerrold there? Tell him I will arrive Tuesday. Answer.

"F. ARMITAGE."

It was along towards nine o'clock when the return message came clicking in on the wires, was written out, and handed to the tall soldier with the tired blue eyes.

He read, started, crushed the paper in his hand, and turned from the office. The answer was significant:

"Lieutenant Jerrold left Sibley yesterday afternoon. Not yet returned. Absent without leave this morning.

"CHESTER."

XI.

Nature never vouchsafed to wearied man a lovelier day of rest than the still Sunday on which Frank Armitage rode slowly back from the station. The soft, mellow tone of the church-bell, tolling the summons for morning service, floated out from the brown tower, and was echoed back from the rocky cliff glistening in the August sunshine on the northern bluff. Groups of villagers hung about the steps of the little sanctuary and gazed with mild curiosity at the arriving parties from the cottages and the hotel. The big red omnibus came up with a load of worshippers, and farther away, down the vista of the road, Armitage could see others on foot and in carriages, all wending their way to church. He was in no mood to meet them. The story that he had been out pursuing a tramp during the night was pretty thoroughly circulated by this time, he felt assured, and every one would connect his early ride to the station, in some way, with the adventure that the grooms, hostlers, cooks, and kitchen-maids had all been dilating upon ever since daybreak. He dreaded to meet the curious glances of the women, and the questions of the few men whom he had taken so far into his confidence as to ask about the mysterious person who came over in the stage with them. He reined up his horse, and then, seeing a little pathway leading into the thick wood to his right, he turned in thither and followed it some fifty yards among bordering treasures of coreopsis and golden-rod and wild luxuriance of vine and foliage. Dismounting in the shade, he threw the reins over his arm and let his horse crop the juicy grasses, while he seated himself on a little stump and fell to thinking again. He could hear the reverent voices of one or two visitors strolling about among the peaceful, flower-decked graves behind the little church and only a short stone's-throw away through the shrubbery. He could hear the low, solemn voluntary of the organ, and presently the glad outburst of young voices in the opening hymn, but he knew that belated ones would still be coming to church, and he would not come forth from his covert until all were out of the way. Then, too, he was glad of a little longer time to think: he did not want to tell the colonel the result of his morning investigations.

To begin with: the watchman, the driver, and the two men whom he had questioned were all of an opinion as to the character of the stranger: "he was a military man." The passengers described his voice as that of a man of education and social position; the driver and passengers declared his walk and carriage to be that of a soldier: he was taller, they said, than the tall, stalwart Saxon captain, but by

no means so heavily built. As to age, they could not tell: his beard was black and curly,—no gray hairs; his movements were quick and elastic; but his eyes were hidden by those colored glasses, and his forehead by the slouch of that broad-brimmed felt hat.

At the station, while awaiting the answer to his despatch, Armitage had questioned the agent as to whether any man of that description had arrived by the night train from the north. He had seen none, he said, but there was Larsen over at the post-office store, who came down on that train; perhaps he could tell. Oddly enough, Mr. Larsen recalled just such a party,—tall, slim, dark, dark-bearded, with blue glasses and dark hat and clothes,—but he was bound for Lakeville, the station beyond, and he remained in the car when he, Larsen, got off. Larsen remembered the man well, because he sat in the rear corner of the smoker and had nothing to say to anybody, but kept reading a newspaper; and the way he came to take note of him was that while standing with two friends at that end of the car they happened to be right around the man. The Saturday evening train from the city is always crowded with people from the river towns who have been up to market or the *matinées*, and even the smoker was filled with standing men until they got some thirty miles down. Larsen wanted to light a fresh cigar, and offered one to each of his friends: then it was found they had no matches, and one of them, who had been drinking a little and felt jovial, turned to the dark stranger and asked him for a light, and the man, without speaking, handed out a little silver match-box. It was just then that the conductor came along, and Larsen saw his ticket. It was a "round trip" to Lakeville: he was evidently going there for a visit, and therefore, said Larsen, he didn't get off at Sablon Station, which was six miles above.

But Armitage knew better. It was evident that he had quietly slipped out on the platform of the car after the regular passengers had got out of the way, and let himself off into the darkness on the side opposite the station. Thence he had an open and unimpeded walk of a few hundred yards until he reached the common, and then, when overtaken by the hotel omnibus, he could jump aboard and ride. There was only one road, only one way over to the hotel, and he could not miss it. There was no doubt now that, whoever he was, the night visitor had come down on the evening train from the city; and his return ticket would indicate that he meant to go back the way he came. It was half-past ten when that train arrived. It was nearly midnight when the man appeared at the cottage window. It was after two when Armitage gave up the search and went to bed. It was possible for the man to have walked to Lakeville, six miles south, and reached the station there in abundant time to take the up-train which passed Sablon, without stopping, a little before daybreak. If he took that train, and if he was Jerrold, he would have been in the city before seven, and could have been at Fort Sibley before or by eight o'clock. But Chester's despatch showed clearly that at 8.30—the hour for signing the company morning reports—Mr. Jerrold was not at his post. Was he still in the neighborhood and waiting for the noon train? If so, could he be confronted on the cars and accused of his crime? He looked at his watch;

it was nearly eleven, and he must push on to the hotel before that hour, report to the colonel, then hasten back to the station. He sprang to his feet, and was just about to mount, when a vision of white and scarlet came suddenly into view. There, within twenty feet of him, making her dainty way through the shrubbery from the direction of the church, sunshine and shadow alternately flitting across her lovely face and form, Alice Renwick stepped forth into the pathway, and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed along the leafy lane towards the road, as though expectant of another's coming. Then, attracted by the beauty of the golden-rod, she bent and busied herself with gathering in the yellow sprays. Armitage, with one foot in the stirrup, stood stock-still, half in surprise, half stunned by a sudden and painful thought. Could it be that she was there in hopes of meeting—any one?

He retook his foot from the stirrup, and, relaxing the rein, still stood gazing at her over his horse's back. That placid quadruped, whose years had been spent in these pleasant by-ways and were too many to warrant an exhibition of coltish surprise, promptly lowered his head and resumed his occupation of grass-nibbling, making a little crunching noise which Miss Renwick might have heard, but apparently did not. She was singing very softly to herself,—

> "Daisy, tell my fortune, pray:
> He loves me not,—he loves me."

And still Armitage stood and gazed, while she, absorbed in her pleasant task, still pulled and plucked at the golden-rod. In all his life no "vision of fair women" had been to him fair and sacred and exquisite as this. Down to the tip of her arched and slender foot, peeping from beneath the broidered hem of her snowy skirt, she stood the lady born and bred, and his eyes looked on and worshipped her,—worshipped, yet questioned, Why came she here? Absorbed, he released his hold on the rein, and Dobbin, nothing loath, reached with his long, lean neck for further herbage, and stepped in among the trees. Still stood his negligent master, fascinated in his study of the lovely, graceful girl. Again she raised her head and looked northward along the winding, shaded wood-path. A few yards away were other great clusters of the wild flowers she loved, more sun-kissed golden-rod, and, with a little murmur of delight, gathering her dainty skirts in one hand, she flitted up the pathway like an unconscious humming-bird garnering the sweets from every blossom. A little farther on the pathway bent among the trees, and she would be hidden from his sight; but still he stood and studied her every movement, drank in the soft, cooing melody of her voice as she sang, and then there came a sweet, solemn strain from the brown, sunlit walls just visible through the trees, and reverent voices and the resonant chords of the organ thrilled through the listening woods the glorious anthem of the church militant.

At the first notes she lifted up her queenly head and stood, listening and appreciative. Then he saw her rounded throat swelling like a bird's, and the rich, full tones of her voice rang out through the

welcoming sunshine, and the fluttering wrens, and proud red-breasted robins, and rival song-queens, the brown-winged thrushes,—even the impudent shrieking jays,—seemed to hush and listen. Dobbin, fairly astonished, lifted up his hollow-eyed head and looked amazedly at the white songstress whose scarlet sash and neck-ribbons gleamed in such vivid contrast to the foliage about her. A wondering little "cotton-tail" rabbit, shy and wild as a hawk, came darting through the bushes into the sunshiny patchwork on the path, and then, uptilted and with quivering ears and nostrils and wide-staring eyes, stood paralyzed with helpless amaze, ignoring the tall man in gray as did the singer herself. Richer, rounder, fuller grew the melody, as, abandoning herself to the impulse of the sacred hour, she joined with all her girlish heart in the words of praise and thanksgiving,—in the glad and triumphant chorus of the Te Deum. From beginning to end she sang, now ringing and exultant, now soft and plaintive, following the solemn words of the ritual,—sweet and low and suppliant in the petition, "We therefore pray Thee help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood," confident and exulting in the declaration, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ," and then rich with fearless trust and faith in the thrilling climax, "Let me never be confounded." Armitage listened as one in a trance. From the depth of her heart the girl had joined her glorious voice to the chorus of praise and adoration, and now that all was stilled once more her head had fallen forward on her bosom, her hands, laden with golden-rod, were joined together: it seemed as though she were lost in prayer.

And this was the girl, this the pure, God-worshipping, God-fearing woman, who for one black instant he had dared to fancy had come here expectant of a meeting with the man whose aim had been frustrated but the night before! He could have thrown himself at her feet and implored her pardon. He *did* step forth, and then, hat in hand, baring his proud Saxon head as his forefathers would have uncovered to their monarch, he waited until she lifted up her eyes and saw him, and knew by the look in his frank face that he had stood by, a mute listener to her unstudied devotions. A lovely flush rose to her very temples, and her eyes drooped their pallid lids until the long lashes swept the crimson of her cheeks.

"Have *you* been here, captain? I never saw you," was her fluttering question.

"I rode in here on my way back from the station, not caring to meet all the good people going to church. I felt like an outcast."

"I, too, am a recreant to-day. It is the first time I have missed service in a long while. Mamma felt too unstrung to come, and I had given up the idea, but both she and Aunt Grace urged me. I was too late for the omnibus, and walked up, and then I would not go in because service was begun, and I wanted to be home again before noon. I cannot bear to be late at church, or to leave it until everything is over, but I can't be away from mother so long to-day. Shall we walk that way now?"

"In a minute. I must find my horse. He is in here somewhere. Tell me how the colonel is feeling, and Mrs. Maynard."

"Both very nervous and worried, though I see nothing extraordinary in the adventure. We read of poor hungry tramps everywhere, and they rarely do harm."

"I wonder a little at your venturing here in the wood-paths, after what occurred last night."

"Why, Captain Armitage, no one would harm me here, so close to the church. Indeed, I never thought of such a thing until you mentioned it. Did you discover anything about the man?"

"Nothing definite; but I must be at the station again to meet the up-train, and have to see the colonel meantime. Let me find Dobbin, or whatever they call this venerable relic I'm riding, and then I'll escort you home."

But Dobbin had strayed deeper into the wood. It was some minutes before the captain could find and catch him. The rich melody of sacred music was again thrilling through the perfumed woods, the glad sunshine was pouring its warmth and blessing over all the earth, glinting on bluff and brake and palisaded cliff, the birds were all singing their rivalling psaltery, and Nature seemed pouring forth its homage to the Creator and Preserver of all on this His holy day, when Frank Armitage once more reached the bowered lane where, fairest, sweetest sight of all, his lady stood waiting him. She turned to him as she heard the hoof-beat on the turf, and smiled.

"Can we wait and hear that hymn through?"

"Ay. Sing it."

She looked suddenly in his face. Something in the very tone in which he spoke startled her,—something deeper, more fervent, than she had ever heard before,—and the expression in the steady, deep-blue eyes was another revelation. Alice Renwick had a woman's intuition, and yet she had not known this man a day. The color again mounted to her temples, and her eyes fell after one quick glance.

"I heard you joining in the Te Deum," he urged. "Sing once more: I love it. There, they are just beginning again. Do you know the words?"

She nodded, then raised her head, and her glad young voice carolled through the listening woods:

"Holy, holy, holy! All
Heaven's triumphant choir shall sing,
When the ransomed nations fall
At the footstool of their King:
Then shall saints and seraphim,
Hearts and voices, swell one hymn
Round the throne with full accord,
Holy, holy, holy Lord!"

There was silence when the music ceased. She had turned her face towards the church, and, as the melody died away in one prolonged, triumphant chord, she still stood in reverent attitude, as though listening for the words of benediction. He, too, was silent, but his eyes were fixed on her. He was thirty-five, she not twenty. He had lived his soldier life wifeless, but, like other soldiers, his heart had had its rubs

and aches in the days gone by. Years before he had thought life a black void when the girl he fancied while yet he wore the Academic gray calmly told him she preferred another. Nor had the intervening years been devoid of their occasional yearnings for a mate of his own in the isolation of the frontier or the monotony of garrison life; but flitting fancies had left no trace upon his strong heart. The love of his life only dawned upon him at this late day when he looked into her glorious eyes and his whole soul went out in passionate worship of the fair girl whose presence made that sunlit lane a heaven. Were he to live a thousand years, no scene on earth could rival in his eyes the love-haunted woodland pathway wherein like forest queen she stood, the sunshine and leafy shadows dancing over her graceful form, the golden-rod enhancing her dark and glowing beauty, the sacred influences of the day throwing their mystic charm about her as though angels guarded and shielded her from harm. His life had reached its climax; his fate was sealed; his heart and soul were centred in one sweet girl,—and all in one brief hour in the woodland lane at Sablon.

She could not fail to see the deep emotion in his eyes as at last she turned to break the silence.

"Shall we go?" she said, simply.

"It is time; but I wish we could remain."

"You do not go to church very often at Sibley, do you?"

"I have not, heretofore; but you would teach me to worship."

"You *have* taught me," he muttered below his breath, as he extended a hand to assist her down the sloping bank towards the avenue. She looked up quickly once more, pleased, yet shy, and shifted her great bunch of golden-rod so that she could lay her hand in his and lean upon its steady strength down the incline; and so, hand in hand, with old Dobbin ambling placidly behind, they passed out from the shaded pathway to the glow and radiance of the sunlit road.

XII.

"Colonel Maynard, I admit everything you say as to the weight of the evidence," said Frank Armitage, twenty minutes later, "but it is my faith—understand me: my *faith*, I say—that she is utterly innocent. As for that damnable letter, I do not believe it was ever written to her. It is some other woman."

"What other is there, or was there?" was the colonel's simple reply.

"That is what I mean to find out. Will you have my baggage sent after me to-night? I am going at once to the station, and thence to Sibley. I will write you from there. If the midnight visitor should prove to have been Jerrold, he can be made to explain. I have always held him to be a conceited fop, but never either crack-brained or devoid of principle. There is no time for explanation *now*. Good-by; and keep a good lookout. That fellow may be here again."

And in an hour more Armitage was skimming along the winding river-side *en route* to Sibley. He had searched the train from pilot to rear platform, and no man who in the faintest degree resembled Mr. Jerrold was on board. He had wired to Chester that he would reach

the fort that evening, but would not resume duty for a few days. He made another search through the train as they neared the city, and still there was no one who in stature or appearance corresponded with the descriptions given him of the sinewy visitor.

Late in the afternoon Chester received him as he alighted from the train at the little station under the cliff. It was a beautiful day, and numbers of people were driving or riding out to the fort, and the high bridge over the gorge was constantly resounding to the thunder of hoofs. Many others, too, had come out on the train; for the evening dress-parade always attracted a swarm of visitors. A corporal of the guard, with a couple of men, was on hand to keep vigilant eye on the arrivals and to persuade certain proscribed parties to re-enter the cars and go on, should they attempt to revisit the post, and the faces of these were lighted up as they saw their old adjutant; but none others of the garrison appeared.

"Let us wait a moment and get these people out of the way," said Armitage. "I want to talk with you. Is Jerrold back?"

"Yes. He came in just ten minutes after I telegraphed to you, was present at inspection, and if it had not been for your despatch this morning I should not have known he had remained out of quarters He appeared to resent my having been to his quarters,—calls it spying, I presume."

"What permission had he to be away?"

"I gave him leave to visit town on personal business yesterday afternoon. He merely asked to be away a few hours to meet friends in town, and Mr. Hall took tattoo roll-call for him. As I do not require any other officer to report the time of his return, I did not exact it of him; but of course no man can be away after midnight without special permission, and he was gone all night. What is it, Armitage? Has he followed her down there?"

"Somebody was there last night and capsized the colonel pretty much as he did you the night of the ladder episode," said Armitage, coolly.

"By heaven! and I let him go!"

"How do you know 'twas he?"

"Who else could it be, Armitage?"

"That's what the colonel asks; but it isn't clear to me yet awhile."

"I wish it were less clear to me," said Chester, gloomily. "The worst is that the story is spreading like a pestilence all over the post. The women have got hold of it, and there is all manner of talk. I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Hoyt had to be taken violently ill. She has written to invite Miss Renwick to visit her, as it is certain that Colonel and Mrs. Maynard cannot come, and Hoyt came to me in a horror of amaze yesterday to know if there were any truth in the rumor that I had caught a man coming out of Mrs. Maynard's window the other night. I would tell him nothing, and he says the ladies declare they won't go to the german if *she* does. Heavens! I'm thankful you are come. The thing has been driving me wild these last twelve hours. I wanted to go away myself. *Is* she coming up?"

"No, she isn't; but let me say this, Chester: that whenever she is ready to return I shall be ready to escort her."

Chester looked at his friend in amazement, and without speaking.

"Yes, I see you are astonished, but you may as well understand the situation. I have heard all the colonel could tell, and have even seen the letter, and since she left here a mysterious stranger has appeared by night at Sablon, at the cottage window, though it happened to be her mother's this time, and I don't believe Alice Renwick knows the first thing about it."

"Armitage, are you in love?"

"Chester, I am in my sound senses. Now come and show me the ladder, and where you found it, and tell me the whole story over again. I think it grows interesting. One moment: has he that picture yet?"

"I suppose so. I don't know. In these last few days everybody is fighting shy of him. He thinks it is my doing, and looks black and sulky at me, but is too proud or too much afraid of consequences to ask the reason of the cold shoulders and averted looks. Gray has taken seven days' leave and gone off with that little girl of his to place her with relatives in the East. He has heard the stories, and it is presumed that some of the women have told her. She was down sick here a day or two."

"Well, now for the window and the ladder. I want to see the outside through your eyes, and then I will view the interior with my own. The colonel bids me do so."

Together they slowly climbed the long stairway leading up the face of the cliff. Chester stopped for a breathing-spell more than once.

"You're all out of condition, man," said the younger captain, pausing impatiently. "What has undone you?"

"This trouble, and nothing else. By gad! it has unstrung the whole garrison, I believe. You never saw our people fall off so in their shooting. Of course we expected Jerrold to go to pieces, but nobody else."

"There were others that seemed to fall away, too. Where was that cavalry-team that was expected to take the skirmish medal away from us?"

"Sound as a dollar, every man, with the single exception of their big sergeant. I don't like to make ugly comparisons to a man whom I believe to be more than half interested in a woman, but it makes me think of the old story about Medusa. One look at her face is too much for a man. That Sergeant McLeod went to grass the instant he caught sight of her, and never has picked up since."

"Consider me considerably more than half interested in the woman in this case, Chester: make all the comparisons that you like, provided they illumine matters as you are doing now, and tell me more of this Sergeant McLeod. What do you mean by his catching sight of her and going to grass?"

"I mean he fell flat on his face the moment he saw her, and hasn't been in good form from that moment to this. The doctor says it's heart-disease."

"That's what the colonel says troubles Mrs. Maynard. She was senseless and almost pulseless some minutes last night. What manner of man is McLeod?"

"A tall, slim, dark-eyed, swarthy fellow,—a man with a history and a mystery, I judge."

"A man with a history,—a mystery,—who is tall, slim, has dark eyes and swarthy complexion, and faints away at sight of Miss Renwick, might be said to possess peculiar characteristics,—family traits, some of them. Of course you've kept an eye on McLeod. Where is he?"

Chester stood leaning on the rail, breathing slowly and heavily. His eyes dilated as he gazed at Armitage, who was surveying him coolly, though the tone in which he spoke betrayed a new interest and a vivid one.

"I confess I never thought of him in connection with this affair," said Chester.

"There's the one essential point of difference between us," was the reply. "You go in on the supposition that there is only one solution to this thing, and that a woman must be dishonored to begin with. I believe there can be several solutions, and that there is only one thing in the lot that is at all impossible."

"What's that?"

"Miss Renwick's knowledge of that night's visitor, or of any other secret or sin. I mean to work other theories first; and the McLeod trail is a good one to start on. Where can I get a look at him?"

"Somewhere out in the Rockies by this time. He was ordered back to his troop five days ago, and they are out scouting at this moment, unless I'm vastly mistaken. You have seen the morning despatches?"

"About the Indians? Yes. Looks squally at the Spirit Rock reservation. Do you mean that McLeod is there?"

"That's where his troop ought to be by this time. There is too small a force on the trail now, and more will have to go if a big outbreak is to be prevented."

"Then he has gone, and I cannot see him. Let me look at the window, then."

A few steps brought them to the terrace, and there, standing by the west wall and looking up at the closed slats of the dormer-window, Captain Chester retold the story of his night-adventure. Armitage listened attentively, asking few questions. When it was finished, the latter turned and walked to the rear door, which opened on the terrace. It was locked.

"The servants are having a holiday, I presume," he said. "So much the better. Ask the quartermaster for the key of the front door, and I'll go in while everybody is out looking at dress-parade. There goes first call now. Let your orderly bring it to me here, will you?"

Ten minutes later, with beating heart, he stood and uncovered his handsome head and gazed silently, reverently around him. He was in her room.

It was dainty as her own dainty self. The dressing-table, the windows, the pretty little white bed, the broad, inviting lounge, the work-table and basket, the very wash-stand, were all trimmed and decked alike,—white and yellow prevailing. White lace curtains

draped the window on the west—that fateful window—and the two that opened out on the roof of the piazza. White lace curtains draped the bed, the dressing-table, and the wash-stand; white lace, or some equally flimsy and feminine material, hung about her book-shelves and work-table and over the lounge; and bows of bright yellow ribbon were everywhere, yellow pin-cushions and wall-pockets hung about the toilet-table, soft yellow rugs lay at the bed- and lounge-side, and a sunshiny tone was given to the whole apartment by the shades of yellow silk that hung close to the windows.

On the wall were some choice etchings and a few foreign photographs. On the book-shelves were a few volumes of poetry, and the prose of George Eliot and our own Hawthorne. Hanging on pegs in the corner of the simple army room, covered by a curtain, were some heavy outer-garments,—an ulster, a travelling coat and cape of English make, and one or two dresses that were apparently too thick to be used at this season of the year. He drew aside the curtain one moment, took a brief glance at the garments, raised the hem of a skirt to his lips, and turned quickly away. A door led from the room to the one behind it, —a spare bedroom, evidently, that was lighted only from the back of the house and had no side-window at all. Another door led to the hall, a broad, old-fashioned affair, and crossing this he stood in the big front room occupied by the colonel and his wife. This was furnished almost as luxuriously (from an army point of view) as that of Miss Renwick, but not in white and yellow. Armitage smiled to see the evidences of Mrs. Maynard's taste and handiwork on every side. In the years he had been the old soldier's adjutant nothing could have exceeded the simplicity with which the colonel surrounded himself. Now it was something akin to Sybaritish elegance, thought the captain; but all the same he made his deliberate survey. There was the big dressing-table and bureau on which had stood that ravished picture,—that photograph of the girl he loved which others were able to speak of, and one man to appropriate feloniously, while yet he had never seen it. His impulse was to go to Jerrold's quarters and take him by the throat and demand it of him; but what right had he? How knew he, even, that it was now there? In view of the words that Chester had used towards him, Jerrold must know of the grievous danger in which he stood. That photograph would prove most damaging evidence if discovered. Very probably, after yielding to his vanity and showing it to Sloat he meant to get it back. Very certainly, after hearing Chester's words he must have determined to lose no time in getting rid of it. He was no fool, if he was a coxcomb.

Looking around the half-darkened room, Armitage lingered long over the photographs which hung about the dressing-table and over the mantel,—several prettily-framed duplicates of those already described as appearing in the album. One after another he took them in his hands, bore them to the window, and studied them attentively: some were not replaced without a long, lingering kiss. He had not ventured to disturb an item in her room. He would not touch the knob of a drawer or attempt to open anything she had closed, but here in quarters where his colonel could claim joint partnership he felt less sentiment or

delicacy. He closed the hall door and tried the lock, turning the knob to and fro. Then he reopened the door and swung it upon its hinges. For a wonder, neither lock nor hinges creaked. The door worked smoothly and with little noise. Then he similarly tried the door of her room. It was in equally good working order,—quite free from the squeak and complaint with which quartermasters' locks and hinges are apt to do their reluctant duty. The discovery pleased him. It was possible for one to open and close these portals noiselessly, if need be, and without disturbing sleepers in either room. Returning to the east chamber, he opened the shades, so as to get more light, and his eye fell upon an old album lying on a little table that stood by the bedside. There was a night-lamp upon the table, too,—a little affair that could hold only a thimbleful of oil and was intended, evidently, to keep merely a faint glow during the night hours. Other volumes—a Bible, some devotional books, like "The Changed Cross," and a Hymnal or two—were also there; but the album stood most prominent, and Armitage curiously took it up and opened it.

There were only half a dozen photographs in the affair. It was rather a case than an album, and was intended apparently for only a few family pictures. There was but one that interested him, and this he examined intently, almost excitedly. It represented a little girl of nine or ten years,—Alice, undoubtedly,—with her arms clasped about the neck of a magnificent St. Bernard dog and looking up into the handsome features of a tall, slender, dark-eyed, black-haired boy of sixteen or thereabouts; and the two were enough alike to be brother and sister. Who, then, was this boy?

Armitage took the photograph to the window and studied it carefully. Parade was over, and the troops were marching back to their quarters. The band was playing gloriously as it came tramping into the quadrangle, and the captain could not but glance out at his own old company as in compact column of fours it entered the grassy diamond and swung off towards the barracks. He saw a knot of officers, too, turning the corner by the adjutant's office, and for a moment he lowered the album to look. Mr. Jerrold was not of the number that came sauntering up the walk, dropping away by ones or twos as they reached their doors and unbuckled their belts or removed their helmets in eager haste to get out of the constraint of full dress. But in another moment Jerrold, too, appeared, all alone, walking rapidly and nervously. Armitage watched him, and could not but see how other men turned away or gave him the coolest possible nod as he passed. The tall, slender lieutenant was handsomer even than when he last saw him; and yet there was gloom and worry on the dark beauty of his face. Nearer and nearer he came, and had passed the quarters of the other officers and was almost at the door of his own, when Armitage saw a little, wiry soldier in full dress uniform running across the parade as though in pursuit. He recognized Merrick, one of the scapegraces of his company, and wondered why he should be chasing after his temporary commander. Just as Jerrold was turning under the piazza the soldier seemed to make himself heard, and the lieutenant, with an angry frown on his face, stopped and confronted him.

"I told you not to come to me again," he said, so loud that every word was audible to the captain standing by the open window above. "What do you mean, sir, by following me in this way?"

The reply was inaudible. Armitage could see the little soldier standing in the respectful position of "attention," looking up and evidently pleading.

"I won't do it until I'm ready," was again heard in Jerrold's angry tones, though this time the lieutenant glanced about, as though to see if others were within earshot. There was no one, apparently, and he grew more confident. "You've been drinking again to-day, Merrick; you're not sober now; and I won't give you money to get maudlin and go to blabbing secrets on. No, sir! Go back to your quarters, and stay there."

The little soldier must indeed have been drinking, as the lieutenant declared. Armitage saw that he hesitated, instead of obeying at once, and that his flushed face was angrily working, then that he was arguing with his superior and talking louder. This was contrary to all the captain's ideas of proper discipline, even though he was indignant at the officer for permitting himself to be placed in so false and undignified a position. Jerrold's words, too, had acquired a wide significance; but they were feeble as compared with the sudden outburst that came from the soldier's lips:

"By God, lieutenant, you bribed me to silence to cover your tracks, and then you refuse to pay. If you don't want me to tell what I know, the sooner you pay that money the better."

This was more than Armitage could stand. He went down-stairs three at a jump and out through the colonel's garden with quick, impetuous steps. Jerrold's furious face turned ashen at the sight, and Merrick, with one amazed and frightened look at his captain, faced about and slunk silently away. To him Armitage paid no further attention. It was to the officer he addressed himself:

"Mr. Jerrold, I have heard pretty much all this conversation. It simply adds to the evil report with which you have managed to surround yourself. Step into your quarters. I must see you alone."

Jerrold hesitated. He was thunderstruck by the sudden appearance of the captain whom he had believed to be hundreds of miles away. He connected his return unerringly with the web of trouble which had been weaving about him of late. He conceived himself to have been most unjustly spied upon and suspected, and was full of resentment at the conduct of Captain Chester. But Chester was an old granny, who sometimes made blunders and had to back down. It was a different thing when Armitage took hold. Jerrold looked sulkily into the clear, stern, blue eyes a moment, and the first impulse of rebellion wilted. He gave one irresolute glance around the quadrangle, then motioned with his hand to the open door. Something of the old, jaunty, Creole lightness of manner reasserted itself.

"After you, captain," he said.

XIII.

Once within-doors, it was too dark for Armitage to see the features of his lieutenant; and he had his own reasons for desiring to read

them. Mr. Jerrold, on the other hand, seemed disposed to keep in the shadows as much as possible. He made no movement to open the shutters of the one window which admitted light from the front, and walked back to his bedroom door, glanced in there as though to see that there were no occupants, then carefully closed it as he returned to face his captain. He took off his helmet and placed it on the centre-table, then, thrusting his thumbs inside the handsome, gold-broidered sword-belt, stood in a jaunty attitude but with a very uneasy look in his eyes to hear what his senior might have to say. Between the two men an invitation to sit would have been a superfluity. Neither had ever remained long enough in the other's quarters, since the exchange of the first calls when Jerrold came to the garrison, to render a chair at all necessary.

"Be good enough to strike a light, Mr. Jerrold," said Armitage, presently, seeing that his unwilling host made no effort on his own account.

"I proposed going out at once, captain, and presume you cannot have any very extended remarks to make."

"You cannot see the writing I have to call your attention to without a light. I shall detain you no longer than is necessary. Had you an engagement?"

"Nothing of great consequence. I presume it will keep."

"It will have to. The matter I have come upon will admit no further delay. Light your lamp, if you please."

And Jerrold did so, slowly and with much reluctance. He wiped his forehead vigorously the instant the flame began to splutter, but as the clear, steady light of the argand gradually spread over the little room Armitage could see the sweat again beading his forehead, and the dark eyes were glancing nervously about, and the hands that were so firm and steady and fine the year before and held the Springfield in so light yet immovable an aim were twitching now. It was no wonder Jerrold's score had dropped some thirty per cent. His nerve had gone to pieces.

Armitage stood and watched him a moment. Then he slowly spoke:

"I have no desire to allude to the subject of your conversation with Merrick. It was to put an end to such a thing—not to avail myself of any information it might give—that I hurried in. We will put that aside and go at once to the matter that brings me back. You are aware, of course, that your conduct has compromised a woman's name, and that the garrison is talking of nothing else."

Jerrold grasped the back of a chair with one slender brown hand, and looked furtively about as though for some hope of escape. Something like a startled gulp seemed to work his throat-muscles an instant; then he stammered his reply:

"I don't know what you mean."

"You *do* know what I mean. Captain Chester has already told you."

"Captain Chester came in here and made an unauthorized inspection of my quarters because he heard a shot fired by a sentry. I was out: I don't deny that. But he proceeded to say all manner of insult-

ing and unwarrantable things, and tried to force me to hand in a resignation, simply because I was out of quarters after taps. I could account for *his* doing something so idiotic, but I'm at a loss to comprehend your taking it up."

"The most serious allegation ever made against an officer of the regiment is made against you, the senior lieutenant of my company, and the evidence furnished me by the colonel and by Captain Chester is of such a character that, unless you can refute it and clear her name, you will have a settlement with me to start with, and your dismissal from the regiment——"

"Settlement with you? What concern have you in the matter?" interrupted Jerrold.

"Waste no words on that, Mr. Jerrold. Understand that where her name is concerned no man on earth is more interested than I. Now answer me. You were absent from your quarters for some hours after the doctor's party. Somebody believed to have been you was seen and fired at for refusing to halt at the order of Captain Chester at 3.30 in the morning. The ladder that usually hung at your fence was found at the colonel's while you were out, and that night a woman's name was compromised beyond repair unless you can repair it. Unless you prove beyond peradventure where you were both that night and last night,—prove beyond question that you were not where you are believed to have been,—her name is stained and yours blackened forever. There are other things you must fully explain; but these first."

Jerrold's face was growing gray and sickly. He stared at the stern eyes before him, and could make no answer. His lips moved dryly, but made no sound.

"Come, I want to hear from you. Where were you, if not with, or seeking, her? Name your place and witnesses."

"By God, Captain Armitage, the army is no longer a place for a gentleman, if his every movement is to be spied upon like this!"

"The world is no place for a man of your stamp, is perhaps a better way of putting it," said Armitage, whose fingers were twitching convulsively, and whose whole frame quivered with the effort he was making to restrain the rage and indignation that consumed him. He could not—he would not—believe in her guilt. He must have this man's proof, no matter how it might damn *him* for good and all, no matter whom else it might involve, so long as it cleared her precious name. He must be patient, he must be calm and resolute; but the man's cold-blooded, selfish, criminal concealment nearly maddened him. With infinite effort he controlled himself, and went on:

"But it is of her I'm thinking, not of you. It is the name you have compromised and can clear, and should clear, even at the expense of your own,—in fact, Mr. Jerrold, *must* clear. Now will you tell me where you were and how you can prove it?"

"I decline to say. I won't be cross-questioned by men who have no authority. Captain Chester said he would refer it to the colonel; and when *he* asks I will answer,—not until then."

"I ask in his name. I am authorized by him, for he is not well enough to meet the ordeal."

"You say so, and I don't mean to dispute your word, Captain Armitage, but I have a right to demand some proof. How am I to know he authorized you?"

"He himself gave me this letter, in your handwriting," said Armitage; and, opening the long envelope, he held forth the missive over which the poor old colonel had gone nearly wild. "He found it the morning they left,—in her garden."

If Jerrold's face had been gray before, it was simply ghastly now. He recoiled from the sight after one fruitless effort to grasp the letter, then rallied with unlooked-for spirit:

"By heaven, Armitage, suppose I *did* write that letter? What does it prove but what I say,—that somebody has been prying and spying into my affairs? How came the colonel by it, if not by fraud or treachery?"

"He picked it up in the garden, I tell you,—among the rose-bushes, where she—where Miss Renwick had been but a few moments before, and where it might appear that she had dropped it."

"*She!* That letter! What had she to do with it? What right had she to read it?"

Armitage stepped impulsively forward. A glad, glorious light was bursting upon his soul. He could almost have seized Jerrold's hand and thanked him; but proofs—proofs were what he needed. It was not his mind that was to be convinced, it was "society" that must be satisfied of her utter innocence, that it might be enabled to say, "Well, I never for a moment believed a word of it." Link by link the chain of circumstantial evidence must be destroyed, and this was only one.

"You mean that that letter was not intended for Miss Renwick?" he asked, with eagerness he strove hard to repress.

"It was never meant for anybody," said Jerrold, the color coming back to his face and courage to his eyes. "That letter was never sent by me to any woman. It's my writing, of course, I can't deny that; but I never even meant it to go. If it left that desk it must have been stolen. I've been hunting high and low for it. I knew that such a thing lying around loose would be the cause of mischief. God! is *that* what all this fuss is about?" And he looked warily, yet with infinite anxiety, into his captain's eyes.

"There is far more to it, as you well know, sir," was the stern answer. "For whom was this written, if not for her? It won't do to *half* clear her name."

"Answer me this, Captain Armitage. Do you mean that that letter has compromised Miss Renwick?—that it is she whose name has been involved, and that it was of her that Chester meant to speak?"

"Certainly it was,—and I too."

There was an instant's silence; then Jerrold began to laugh nervously:

"Oh, well, I fancy it isn't the first time the revered and respected captain has got away off the track. All the same I do not mean to overlook his language to me; and I may say right now, Captain Armitage, that yours, too, calls for explanation."

"You shall have it in short order, Mr. Jerrold, and the sooner you

understand the situation the better. So far as I am concerned, Miss Renwick needed no defender; but, thanks to your mysterious and unwarranted absence from quarters two very unlucky nights, and to other circumstances I have no need to name, and to your *penchant* for letter-writing of a most suggestive character, it *is* Miss Renwick whose name has been brought into question here at this post, and most prominently so. In plain words, Mr. Jerrold, you who brought this trouble upon her by your own misconduct must clear her, no matter at whose expense, or——"

"Or what?"

"I make no threats. I prefer that you should make the proper explanations from a proper sense of what is due."

"And suppose I say that no man is called upon to explain a situation which has been distorted and misrepresented by the evil imagination of his fellows?"

"Then I may have to wring the truth out of you,—and *will;* but, for her sake, I want as little publicity as possible. After this display on your part, I am not bound to show you any consideration whatever. Understand this, however: the array of evidence that you were feloniously inside Colonel Maynard's quarters that night and at his cottage window last night is of such a character that a court would convict you unless your *alibi* was conclusive. Leave the service you certainly shall, unless this whole thing is cleared up."

"I never was anywhere near Colonel Maynard's either last night or the other night I was absent."

"You will have to prove it. Mere denials won't help you in the face of such evidence as we have that you were there the first time."

"What evidence?"

"The photograph that was stolen from Mrs. Maynard between two and four o'clock that morning was seen in your drawer by Major Sloat at reveille. You were fool enough to show it to him."

"Captain Armitage, I shall be quite able to show, when the proper time comes, that the photograph I showed Major Sloat was *not* stolen: it was given me."

"That is beyond belief, Mr. Jerrold. Once and for all, understand this case. You have compromised her good name by the very mystery of your actions. You have it in your power to clear her by proving where you were, since you were not near her,—by showing how you got that photograph,—by explaining how you came to write so strange a letter. Now I say to you, will you do it, instantly, or must we wring it from you?"

A sneering smile was the only answer for a moment; then,—

"I shall take great pleasure in confounding my enemies should the matter be brought before a court,—I'm sure if the colonel can stand that sort of thing I can,—but as for defending myself or anybody else from utterly unjust and proofless suspicions, it's quite another thing."

"Good God, Jerrold! do you realize what a position you are taking? Do you——"

"Oh, not at all, captain," was the airy reply, "not at all. It is not a position I have taken: it is one into which you misguided con-

spirators have forced me. I certainly am not required to compromise anybody else in order to relieve a suspicion which you, not I, have created. How do you know that there may not be some other woman whose name I propose to guard? You have been really very flattering in your theories so far."

Armitage could bear no more. The airy conceit and insolence of the man overcame all self-restraint and resolution. With one bound he was at his throat, his strong white hands grasping him in a sudden, vice-like grip, then hurling him with stunning, thundering force to the floor. Down, headlong, went the tall lieutenant, his sword clattering by his side, his slim brown hands clutching wildly at anything that might bear him up, and dragging with him in his catastrophe a rack of hunting-pouches, antlers, and one heavy double-barrelled shot-gun. All came tumbling down about the struggling form, and Armitage, glaring down at him with clinching fists and rasping teeth, had only time to utter one deep-drawn malediction when he noted that the struggles ceased and Jerrold lay quite still. Then the blood began to ooze from a jagged cut near the temple, and it was evident that the hammer of the gun had struck him.

Another moment, and the door opened, and with anxious face Chester strode into the room. "You haven't killed him, Armitage? Is it as bad as that?"

"Pick him up, and we'll get him on the bed. He's only stunned. I didn't even hit him. Those things tumbled afterwards," said Armitage, as between them they raised the dead weight of the slender Adonis in their arms and bore him to the bedroom. Here they bathed the wound with cold water and removed the uniform coat, and presently the lieutenant began to revive and look about him.

"Who struck me?" he faintly asked.

"Your shot-gun fell on your head, but I threw you down, Jerrold. I'm sorry I touched you, but you're lucky it was no worse. This thing is going to raise a big bump here. Shall I send the doctor?"

"No. I'll come round presently. We'll see about this thing afterwards."

"Is there any friend you want to see? Shall I send word to anybody?" asked Chester.

"No. Don't let anybody come. Tell my striker to bring my breakfast; but I want nothing to-night but to be let alone."

"At least you will let me help you undress and get to bed?" said Chester.

"No. I wish you'd go,—both of you. I want quiet,—peace,—and there's none of it with either of you."

And so they left him. Later Captain Chester had gone to the quarters, and, after much parleying from without, had gained admission. Jerrold's head was bound in a bandage wet with arnica and water. He had been solacing himself with a pipe and a whiskey toddy, and was in a not unnaturally ugly mood.

"You may consider yourself excused from duty until your face is well again, by which time this matter will be decided. I admonish you to remain here and not leave the post until it is."

"You can prefer charges and see what you'll make of it," was the vehement reply. "Devil a bit will I help you out of the thing, after this night's work."

XIV.

Tuesday, and the day of the long-projected german had come; and if ever a lot of garrison-people were wishing themselves well out of a flurry it was the social circle at Sibley. Invitations had been sent to all the prominent people in town who had shown any interest in the garrison since the regiment's arrival; beautiful favors had been procured; an elaborate supper had been prepared,—the ladies contributing their efforts to the salads and other solids, the officers wisely confining their donations to the wines. It was rumored that new and original figures were to be danced, and much had been said about this feature in town, and much speculation had been indulged in; but the Beaubien residence had been closed until the previous day, Nina was away with her mother and beyond reach of question, and Mr. Jerrold had not shown his face in town since her departure. Nor was he accessible when visitors inquired at the fort. They had never known such mysterious army people in their lives. What on earth could induce them to be so close-mouthed about a mere german? one might suppose they had something worth concealing; and presently it became noised abroad that there was genuine cause for perplexity, and possibly worse.

To begin with, every one at Sibley now knew something of the night adventure at the colonel's, and, as no one could give the true statement of the case, the stories in circulation were gorgeous embellishments of the actual facts. It would be useless, even if advisable, to attempt to reproduce these wild theories, but never was army garrison so tumultuously stirred by the whirlwind of rumor. It was no longer denied for an instant that the absence of the colonel and his household was the direct result of that night's discoveries; and when, to Mrs. Hoyt's inexpressible relief, there came a prettily-worded note from Alice on Monday evening informing her that neither the colonel nor her mother felt well enough to return to Sibley for the german, and that she herself preferred not to leave her mother at a time when she needed her care, Mrs. Hoyt and her intimates, with whom she instantly conferred, decided that there could be no doubt whatever that the colonel knew of the affair, had forbidden their return, and was only waiting for further evidence to decide what was to be done with his erring stepdaughter. Women talked with bated breath of the latest stories in circulation, of Chester's moody silence and preoccupation, of Jerrold's ostracism, and of Frank Armitage's sudden return.

On Monday morning the captain had quietly appeared in uniform at the office, and it was known that he had relinquished the remainder of his leave of absence and resumed command of his company. There were men in the garrison who well knew that it was because of the mystery overhanging the colonel's household that Armitage had so suddenly returned. They asked no questions and sought no explanation. All men marked, however, that Jerrold was not at the office on Monday, and many curiously looked at the morning report in the

adjutant's office. No, he was not in arrest; neither was he on sick-report. He was marked present for duty, and yet he was not at the customary assembly of all the commissioned officers at head-quarters. More mystery, and most exasperating, too, it was known that Armitage and Jerrold had held a brief talk in the latter's quarters soon after Sunday's evening parade, and that the former had been reinforced for a time by Captain Chester, with whom he was afterwards closeted. Officers who heard that he had suddenly returned and was at Chester's went speedily to the latter's quarters,—at least two or three did,—and were met by a servant at the door, who said that the gentlemen had just gone out the back way. And, sure enough, neither Chester nor Armitage came home until long after taps; and then the colonel's cook told several people that the two gentlemen had spent over an hour up-stairs in the colonel's and Miss Alice's room and "was foolin' around the house till near ten o'clock."

Another thing that added to the flame of speculation and curiosity was this. Two of the ladies, returning from a moonlit stroll on the terrace just after tattoo, came through the narrow passage-way on the west side of the colonel's quarters, and there, at the foot of the little flight of steps leading up to the parade, they came suddenly upon Captain Chester, who was evidently only moderately pleased to see them and nervously anxious to expedite their onward movement. With the perversity of both sexes, however, they stopped to chat and inquire what he was doing there, and in the midst of it all a faint light gleamed on the opposite wall and the reflection of the curtains in Alice Renwick's window was distinctly visible. Then a sturdy masculine shadow appeared, and there was a rustling above, and then, with exasperating, mysterious, and epigrammatic terseness, a deep voice propounded the utterly senseless question,—

"How's that?"

To which, in great embarrassment, Chester replied,—

"Hold on a minute. I'm talking with some interested spectators."

Whereat the shadow of the big man shot out of sight, and the ladies found that it was useless to remain,—there would be no further developments so long as they did; and so they came away, with many a lingering backward look. "But the idea of asking such a fool question as 'How's that?' Why couldn't the man *say* what he meant?" It was gathered, however, that Armitage and Chester had been making some experiments that bore in some measure on the mystery. And all this time Mr. Jerrold was in his quarters, only a stone's-throw away. How interested *he* must have been!

But, while the garrison was relieved at knowing that Alice Renwick would not be on hand for the german and it was being fondly hoped she might never return to the post, there was still another grievous embarrassment. How about Mr. Jerrold?

He had been asked to lead when the german was first projected, and had accepted. That was fully two weeks before; and now—no one knew just what ought to be done. It was known that Nina Beaubien had returned on the previous day from a brief visit to the upper lakes, and that she had a costume of ravishing beauty in which

to carry desolation to the hearts of the garrison belles in leading that german with Mr. Jerrold. Old Madame Beaubien had been reluctant, said her city friends, to return at all. She heartily disapproved of Mr. Jerrold, and was bitterly set against Nina's growing infatuation for him. But Nina was headstrong and determined: moreover, she was far more than a match for her mother's vigilance, and it was known at Sibley that two or three times the girl had been out at the fort with the Suttons and other friends when the old lady believed her in quarters totally different. Cub Sutton had confided to Captain Wilton that Madame Beaubien was in total ignorance of the fact that there was to be a party at the doctor's the night he had driven out with Nina and his sister, and that Nina had "pulled the wool over her mother's eyes" and made her believe she was going to spend the evening with friends in town, naming a family with whom the Beaubiens were intimate. A long drive always made the old lady sleepy, and, as she had accompanied Nina to the fort that afternoon, she went early to bed, having secured her wild birdling, as she supposed, from possibility of further meetings with Jerrold. For nearly a week, said Cub, Madame Beaubien had dogged Nina so that she could not get a moment with the man with whom she was evidently so smitten, and the girl was almost at her wits' end with seeing the depth of his flirtation with Alice Renwick and the knowledge that on the morrow her mother would spirit her off to the cool breezes and blue waves of the great lake. Cub said she so worked on Fanny's feelings that they put up the scheme together and made him bring them out. Gad! if old Maman only found it out there'd be no more germans for Nina. She'd ship her off to the good Sisters at Creve-Cœur and slap her into a convent and leave all her money to the Church.

And yet, said city society, old Maman idolized her beautiful daughter and could deny her no luxury or indulgence. She dressed her superbly, though with a somewhat barbaric taste where Nina's own good sense and Eastern teaching did not interfere. What she feared was that the girl would fall in love with some adventurer, or—what was quite as bad—some army man who would carry her darling away to Arizona or other inaccessible spot. Her plan was that Nina should marry here—at home—some one of the staid young merchant princes rising into prominence in the Western metropolis, and from the very outset Nina had shown a singular infatuation for the buttons and straps and music and heaven-knows-what-all out at the fort. She gloried in seeing her daughter prominent in all scenes of social life. She rejoiced in her triumphs, and took infinite pains with all preparations. She would have set her foot against Nina's simply dancing the german at the fort with Jerrold as a partner, but she could not resist it that the papers should announce on Sunday morning that "the event of the season at Fort Sibley was the german given last Tuesday night by the ladies of the garrison and led by the lovely Miss Beaubien" with Lieutenant or Captain Anybody. There were a dozen bright, graceful, winning women among the dames and damsels at the fort, and Alice Renwick was a famous beauty by this time. It was more than Maman Beaubien could withstand, that her Nina should "lead" all these, and

so her consent was won. Back they came from Chequamegon, and the stately home on Summit Avenue reopened to receive them. It was Monday noon when they returned, and by three o'clock Fanny Sutton had told Nina Beaubien what she knew of the wonderful rumors that were floating in from Sibley. She was more than half disposed to be in love with Jerrold herself. She expected a proper amount of womanly horror, incredulity, and indignation; but she was totally unprepared for the outburst that followed. Nina was transformed into a tragedy queen on the instant, and poor, simple-hearted, foolish Fanny Sutton was almost scared out of her small wits by the fire of denunciation and fury with which her story was greeted. She came home with white, frightened face and hunted up Cub and told him that she had been telling Nina some of the queer things the ladies had been saying about Mr. Jerrold, and Nina almost tore her to pieces, and could he go right out to the fort to see Mr. Jerrold? Nina wanted to send a note at once; and if he couldn't go she had made her promise that she would get somebody to go instantly and to come back and let her know before four o'clock. Cub was always glad of an excuse to go out to the fort, but a coldness had sprung up between him and Jerrold. He had heard the ugly rumors in that mysterious way in which all such things are heard, and, while his shallow pate could not quite conceive of such a monstrous scandal and he did not believe half he heard, he sagely felt that in the presence of so much smoke there was surely some fire, and avoided the man from whom he had been inseparable. Of course he had not spoken to him on the subject, and, singularly enough, this was the case with all the officers at the post except Armitage and the commander. It was understood that the matter was in Chester's hands, to do with as was deemed best. It was believed that his resignation had been tendered; and all these forty-eight hours since the story might be said to be fairly before the public, Jerrold had been left much to himself, and was presumably in the depths of dismay.

One or two men, urged by their wives, who thought it was really time something were done to let him understand he ought not to lead the german, had gone to see him and been refused admission. Asked from within what they wanted, the reply was somewhat difficult to frame, and in both cases resolved itself into "Oh, about the german;" to which Jerrold's voice was heard to say, "The german's all right. I'll lead if I'm well enough and am not bothered to death meantime; but I've got some private matters to attend to, and am not seeing anybody to-day." And with this answer they were fain to be content. It had been settled, however, that the officers were to tell Captain Chester at ten o'clock that in their opinion Mr. Jerrold ought not to be permitted to attend so long as this mysterious charge hung over him; and Mr. Rollins had been notified that he must be ready to lead.

Poor Rollins! He was in sore perplexity. He wanted nothing better than to dance with Nina Beaubien. He wondered if she *would* lead with him, or would even come at all when she learned that Jerrold would be unable to attend. "Sickness" was to be the ostensible cause, and in the youth and innocence of his heart Rollins never supposed that Nina would hear of all the other assignable reasons. He meant

to ride in and call upon her Monday evening; but, as ill luck would have it, old Sloat, who was officer of the day, stepped on a round pebble as he was going down the long flight to the railway-station, and sprained his ankle. Just at five o'clock Rollins got orders to relieve him, and was returning from the guard-house, when who should come driving in but Cub Sutton, and Cub reined up and asked where he would be apt to find Mr. Jerrold.

"He isn't well, and has been denying himself to all callers to-day," said Rollins, shortly.

"Well, I've got to see him, or at least get a note to him," said Cub. "It's from Miss Beaubien, and requires an answer."

"You know the way to his quarters, I presume," said Rollins, coldly: "you have been there frequently. I will have a man hold your horse, or you can tie him there at the rail, just as you please."

"Thanks. I'll go over, I believe." And go he did, and poor Rollins was unable to resist the temptation of watching whether the magic name of Nina would open the door. It did not; but he saw Cub hand in the little note through the shutters, and ere long there came another from within. This Cub stowed in his waistcoat-pocket and drove off with, and Rollins walked jealously homeward. But that evening he went through a worse experience, and it was the last blow to his budding passion for sparkling-eyed Nina.

It was nearly tattoo, and a dark night, when Chester suddenly came in:

"Rollins, you remember my telling you I was sure some of the men had been getting liquor in from the shore down below the station and 'running it' that way? I believe we can nab the smuggler this evening. There's a boat down there now. The corporal has just told me."

Smuggling liquor was one of Chester's horrors. He surrounded the post with a cordon of sentries who had no higher duty, apparently, than that of preventing the entrance of alcohol in any form. He had run a "red-cross" crusade against the post-trader's store in the matter of light wines and small beer, claiming that only adulterated stuff was sold to the men, and forbidding the sale of anything stronger than "pop" over the trader's counter. Then, when it became apparent that liquor was being brought on the reservation, he made vigorous efforts to break up the practice. Colonel Maynard rather poohpoohed the whole business. It was his theory that a man who was determined to have a drink might better be allowed to take an honest one, *coram publico*, than a smuggled and deleterious article; but he succumbed to the rule that only "light wines and beer" should be sold at the store, and was lenient to the poor devils who overloaded and deranged their stomachs in consequence. But Chester no sooner found himself in command than he launched into the crusade with redoubled energy, and spent hours of the day and night trying to capture invaders of the reservation with a bottle in their pockets. The bridge was guarded, so was the crossing of the Cloudwater to the south, and so were the two roads entering from the north and west; and yet there was liquor coming in, and, as though "to give Chester a benefit," some of the men in barracks had a royal

old spree on Saturday night, and the captain was sorer-headed than any of the participants in consequence. In some way he heard that a row-boat came up at night and landed supplies of contraband down by the river-side out of sight and hearing of the sentry at the railway-station, and it was thither he hurriedly led Rollins this Monday evening.

They turned across the railway on reaching the bottom of the long stairs, and scrambled down the rocky embankment on the other side, Rollins following in reluctant silence and holding his sword so that it would not rattle, but he had no faith in the theory of smugglers. He felt in some vague and unsatisfactory way a sense of discomfort and anxiety over his captain's late proceedings, and this stealthy descent seemed fraught with ill omen.

Once down in the flats, their footsteps made no noise in the yielding sand, and all was silence save for the plash of the waters along the shores. Far down the river were the reflections of one or two twinkling lights, and close under the bank in the slack-water a few stars were peeping at their own images, but no boat was there, and the captain led still farther to a little copse of willow, and there, in the shadows, sure enough, was a row-boat, with a little lantern dimly burning, half hidden in the stern.

Not only that, but as they halted at the edge of the willows the captain put forth a warning hand and cautioned silence. No need. Rollins's straining eyes were already fixed on two figures that were standing in the shadows not ten feet away,—one that of a tall, slender man, the other a young girl. It was a moment before Rollins could recognize either; but in that moment the girl had turned suddenly, had thrown her arms about the neck of the tall young man, and, with her head pillowed on his breast, was gazing up in his face.

"Kiss me once more, Howard. Then I must go," they heard her whisper.

Rollins seized his captain's sleeve, and strove, sick at heart, to pull him back; but Chester stoutly stood his ground. In the few seconds more that they remained they saw his arms more closely enfold her. They saw her turn at the brink, and, in an utter abandonment of rapturous, passionate love, throw her arms again about his neck and stand on tiptoe to reach his face with her warm lips. They could not fail to hear the caressing tone of her every word, or to mark his receptive but gloomy silence. They could not mistake the voice,—the form, shadowy though it was. The girl was Nina Beaubien, and the man, beyond question, Howard Jerrold. They saw him hand her into the light skiff and hurriedly kiss her good-night. Once again, as though she could not leave him, her arms were thrown about his neck and she clung to him with all her strength; then the little boat swung slowly out into the stream, the sculls were shipped, and with practised hand Nina Beaubien pulled forth into the swirling waters of the river, and the faint light, like slowly-setting star, floated downward with the sweeping tide and finally disappeared beyond the point.

Then Jerrold turned to leave, and Chester stepped forth and confronted him:

"Mr. Jerrold, did I not instruct you to confine yourself to your

quarters until satisfactory explanation was made of the absences with which you are charged?"

Jerrold started at the abrupt and unlooked-for greeting, but his answer was prompt:

"Not at all, sir. You gave me to understand that I was to remain here—not to leave the post—until you had decided on certain points; and, though I do not admit the justice of your course, and though you have put me to grave inconvenience, I obeyed the order. I needed to go to town to-day on urgent business, but, between you and Captain Armitage, am in no condition to go. For all this, sir, there will come proper retribution when my colonel returns. And now, sir, you are spying upon me,—*spying*, I say,—and it only confirms what I said of you before."

"Silence, Mr. Jerrold! This is insubordination."

"I don't care a damn what it is, sir! There is nothing contemptuous enough for me to say of you or your conduct to me——"

"Not another word, Mr. Jerrold! Go to your quarters in arrest. —Mr. Rollins, you are witness to this language."

But Rollins was not. Turning from the spot in blankness of heart before a word was uttered between them, he followed the waning light with eyes full of yearning and trouble; he trudged his way down along the sandy shore until he came to the silent waters of the slough and could go no farther; and then he sat him down and covered his face with his hands. It was pretty hard to bear.

XV.

Tuesday still, and all manner of things had happened and were still to happen in the hurrying hours that followed Sunday night. The garrison woke at Tuesday's reveille in much perturbation of spirit, as has been said, but by eight o'clock and breakfast-time one cause of perplexity was at an end. Relief had come with Monday afternoon and Alice Renwick's letter saying she would not attend the german, and now still greater relief in the news that sped from mouth to mouth: Lieutenant Jerrold was in close arrest. Armitage and Chester had been again in consultation Monday night, said the gossips, and something new had been discovered,—no one knew just what,—and the toils had settled upon Jerrold's handsome head, and now he was to be tried. As usual in such cases, the news came in through the kitchen, and most officers heard it at the breakfast-table from the lips of their better halves, who could hardly find words to express their sentiments as to the inability of their lords to explain the new phase of the situation. When the first sergeant of Company B came around to Captain Armitage with the sick-book, soon after six in the morning, the captain briefly directed him to transfer Lieutenant Jerrold on the morning report from present for duty to "in arrest," and no sooner was it known at the quarters of Company B than it began to work back to Officers' Row through the medium of the servants and strikers.

It was the sole topic of talk for a full hour. Many ladies who had intended going to town by the early train almost perilled their chances of catching the same in their eagerness to hear further details.

But the shriek of the whistle far up the valley broke up the group that was so busily chatting and speculating over in the quadrangle, and, with shy yet curious eyes, the party of at least a dozen—matrons and maids, wives or sisters of the officers—scurried past the darkened windows of Mr. Jerrold's quarters, and through the mysterious passage west of the colonel's silent house, and down the long stairs, just in time to catch the train that whirled them away city-ward almost as soon as it had disgorged the morning's mail. Chatting and laughing, and full of blithe anticipation of the glories of the coming german, in preparation for which most of their number had found it necessary to run in for just an hour's shopping, they went jubilantly on their way. Shopping done, they would all meet, take luncheon together at the "Woman's Exchange," return to the post by the afternoon train, and have plenty of time for a little nap before dressing for the german. Perhaps the most interesting question now up for discussion was, who would lead with Mr. Rollins? The train went puffing into the crowded dépôt: the ladies hastened forth, and in a moment were on the street; cabs and carriages were passed in disdain; a brisk walk of a block carried them to the main thoroughfare and into the heart of the shopping district; a rush of hoofs and wheels and pedestrians there encountered them, and the roar assailed their sensitive and unaccustomed ears, yet high above it all pierced and pealed the shrill voices of the newsboys darting here and there with their eagerly-bought journals. But women bent on germans and shopping have time and ears for no such news as that which demands the publication of extras. Some of them never hear or heed the cry, "Indian Massacree!" "Here y'are! All about the killin' of Major Thornton an' his sojers!" "Extry!—extry!" It is not until they reach the broad portals of the great Stewart of the West that one of their number, half incredulously, buys a copy and reads aloud: "Major Thornton, ——th Infantry, Captain Langham and Lieutenant Bliss, ——th Cavalry, and thirty men, are killed. Captains Wright and Lane and Lieutenants Willard and Brooks, ——th Cavalry, and some forty more men, are seriously wounded. The rest of the command is corralled by an overwhelming force of Indians, and their only hope is to hold out until help can reach them. All troops along the line of the Union Pacific are already under orders."

"Oh, isn't it dreadful?"

"Yes; but aren't you glad it wasn't Ours? Oh, look! there's Nina Beaubien over there in her carriage. *Do* let's find out if she's going to lead with Rollins!"

Væ victis! Far out in the glorious Park country in the heart of the Centennial State a little band of blue-coats, sent to succor a perilled agent, is making desperate stand against fearful odds. Less than two hundred men has the wisdom of the Department sent forth through the wilderness to find and, if need be, fight its way through five times its weight in well-armed foes. The officers and men have no special quarrel with those Indians, nor the Indians with them. Only two winters before, when those same Indians were sick and starving, and their lying go-betweens, the Bureau-employees, would give them neither food nor justice, a small band made their way to the railway and were

fed on soldier food and their wrongs righted by soldier justice. But another snarl has come now, and this time the Bureau-people are in a pickle, and the army—ever between two fires at least, and thankful when it isn't six—is ordered to send a little force and go out there and help the agent maintain his authority. The very night before the column reaches the borders of the reservation the leading chiefs come in camp to interview the officers, shake hands, beg tobacco, and try on their clothes, then go back to their braves and laugh as they tell there are only a handful, and plan the morrow's ambuscade and massacre. *Væ victis!* There are women and children among the garrisons along the Union Pacific whose hearts have little room for thoughts of germans in the horror of this morning's tidings. But Sibley is miles and miles away, and, as Mrs. Wheeler says, aren't you glad it wasn't Ours?

Out at the fort there is a different scene. The morning journals and the clicking telegraph send a thrill throughout the whole command. The train has barely whistled out of sight when the ringing notes of officers' call resound through the quadrangle and out over the broader drill-ground beyond. Wondering, but prompt, the staid captains and eager subalterns come hurrying to head-quarters, and the band, that had come forth and taken its station on the parade, all ready for guard-mount, goes quickly back, while the men gather in big squads along the shaded row of their quarters and watch the rapid assembly at the office. And there old Chester, with kindling eyes, reads to the silent company the brief official order. Ay, though it be miles and miles away, fast as steam and wheel can take it, the good old regiment in all its sturdy strength goes forth to join the rescue of the imprisoned comrades far in the Colorado Rockies. "Have your entire command in readiness for immediate field-service in the Department of the Platte. Special train will be there to take you by noon at latest." And though many a man has lost friend and comrade in the tragedy that calls them forth, and though many a brow clouds for the moment with the bitter news of such useless sacrifice, every eye brightens, every muscle seems to brace, every nerve and pulse to throb and thrill with the glorious excitement of quick assembly and coming action. Ay, we are miles and miles away; we leave the dear old post, with homes and firesides, wives, children, and sweethearts, all to the care of the few whom sickness or old wounds or advancing years render unfit for hard, sharp marching; and, thank God! we'll be there to take a hand and help those gallant fellows out of their "corral" or to have one good blow at the cowardly hounds who lured and lied to them.

How the "assembly" rings on the morning air! How quick they spring to ranks, those eager bearded faces and trim blue-clad forms! How buoyant and brisk even the elders seem as the captains speed over to their company quarters and the quick, stirring orders are given! "Field kits; all the cooked rations you have on hand; overcoat, blanket, extra socks and underclothes; every cartridge you've got; haversack and canteen, and nothing else. Now get ready,—lively!" How irrepressible is the cheer that goes up! How we pity the swells of the light battery who have to stay! How wistful those fellows look, and how eagerly they throng about the barracks, yearning to go,

and, since that is denied, praying to be of use in some way! Small wonder is it that all the bustle and excitement penetrates the portals of Mr. Jerrold's darkened quarters, and the shutters are thrown open and his bandaged head comes forth.

"What is it, Harris?" he demands of a light-batteryman who is hurrying past.

"Orders for Colorado, sir. The regiment goes by special train. Major Thornton's command's been massacred, and there's a big fight ahead."

"My God! Here!—stop one moment. Run over to Company B and see if you can find my servant, or Merrick, or somebody. If not, you come back quick. I want to send a note to Captain Armitage."

"I can take it, sir. We're not going. The band and the battery have to stay."

And Jerrold, with trembling hand and feverish haste, seats himself at the same desk whence on that fatal morning he sent the note that wrought such disaster; and as he rises and hands his missive forth, throwing wide open the shutters as he does so, his bedroom doors fly open, and a whirling gust of the morning wind sweeps through from rear to front, and half a score of bills and billets, letters and scraps of paper, go ballooning out upon the parade.

"By heaven!" he mutters, "that's how it happened, is it? *Look* at them go!" for going they were, in spiral eddies or fluttering skips, up the grassy "quad," and over among the rose-bushes of Alice Renwick's garden. Over on the other side of the narrow, old-fashioned frontier fort the men were bustling about, and their exultant, eager voices rang out on the morning air. All was life and animation, and even in Jerrold's selfish soul there rose responsive echo to the soldierly spirit that seemed to pervade the whole command. It was their first summons to active field-duty with prospective battle since he had joined, and, with all his shortcomings as a "duty" officer in garrison and his many frailties of character, Jerrold was not the man to lurk in the rear when there was danger ahead. It dawned on him with sudden and crushing force that now it lay in the power of his enemies to do him vital injury,—that he could be held here at the post like a suspected felon, a mark for every finger, a target for every tongue, while every other officer of his regiment was hurrying with his men to take his knightly share in the coming onset. It was intolerable, shameful. He paced the floor of his little parlor in nervous misery, ever and anon gazing from the window for sight of his captain. It was to him he had written, urging that he be permitted a few moments' talk. "This is no time for a personal misunderstanding," he wrote. "I must see you at once. I can clear away the doubts, can explain my action; but, for heaven's sake, intercede for me with Captain Chester that I may go with the command."

As luck would have it, Armitage was with Chester at the office when the letter was handed in. He opened it, gave a whistle of surprise, and simply held it forth to the temporary commander.

"Read that," he said.

Chester frowned, but took the note and looked it curiously over.

"I have no patience with the man now," he said. "Of course after what I saw last night I begin to understand the nature of his defence; but we don't want any such man in the regiment, after this. What's the use of taking him with us?"

"That isn't the point," said Armitage. "Now or never, possibly, is the time to clear up this mystery. Of course Maynard will be up to join us by the first train; and what won't it be worth to him to have positive proof that all his fears were unfounded?"

"Even if it wasn't Jerrold, there is still the fact that I saw a man clambering out of her window. How is that to be cleared up?" said Chester, gloomily.

"That may come later, and won't be such a bugbear as you think. If you were not worried into a morbid condition over all this trouble, you would not look so seriously upon a thing which I regard as a piece of mere night prowling, with a possible spice of romance."

"What romance, I'd like to know?"

"Never mind that now: I'm playing detective for the time being. Let me see Jerrold for you and find out what he has to offer. Then you can decide. Are you willing? All right! But remember this while I think of it. You admit that the light you saw on the wall Sunday night was exactly like that which you saw the night of your adventure, and that the shadows were thrown in the same way. You thought that night that the light was turned up and afterwards turned out in her room, and that it was *her* figure you saw at the window. Didn't you?"

"Yes. What then?"

"Well, I believe her statement that she saw and heard nothing until reveille. I believe it was Mrs. Maynard who did the whole thing, without Miss Renwick's knowing anything about it."

"Why?"

"Because I accomplished the feat with the aid of the little night-lamp that I found by the colonel's bedside. It is my theory that Mrs. Maynard was restless after the colonel finally fell asleep, that she heard your tumble, and took her little lamp, crossed over into Miss Renwick's room, opened the door without creaking, as I can do to your satisfaction, found her sleeping quietly, but the room a trifle close and warm, set her night-lamp down on the table, as I did, threw her shadow on the wall, as I did, and opened the shade, as you thought her daughter did. Then she withdrew, and left those doors open,—both hers and her daughter's,—and the light, instead of being turned down, as you thought, was simply carried back into her own room."

"That is all possible. But how about the man in her room? Nothing was stolen, though money and jewelry were lying around loose. If theft was not the object, what was?"

"Theft certainly was not, and I'm not prepared to say what was, but I have reason to believe it wasn't Miss Renwick."

"Anything to prove it?"

"Yes; and, though time is precious and I cannot show you, you may take my word for it. We must be off at noon, and both of us

have much to do, but there may be no other chance to talk, and before you leave this post I want you to realize her utter innocence."

"I want to, Armitage."

"I know you do: so look here. We assume that the same man paid the night visit both here and at Sablon, and that he wanted to see the same person,—if he did not come to steal: do we not?"

"Yes."

"We know that at Sablon it was Mrs. Maynard he sought and called. The colonel says so."

"Yes."

"Presumably, then, it was she—not her daughter—he had some reasons for wanting to see here at Sibley. What is more, if he wanted to see Miss Renwick there was nothing to prevent his going right into her window?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I believe I can prove he didn't; on the contrary, that he went around by the roof of the porch to the colonel's room and tried there, but found it risky on account of the blinds, and that finally he entered the hall window,—what might be called neutral ground. The painters had been at work there, as you said, two days before, and the paint on the slats was not quite dry. The blinds and sills were the only things they had touched up on that front, it seems, and nothing on the sides. Now, on the fresh paint of the colonel's slats are the new imprints of masculine thumb and fingers, and on the sill of the hall window is a footprint that I know to be other than Jerrold's."

"Why?"

"Because he doesn't own such a thing as this track was made with, and I don't know a man in this command who does. It was the handiwork of the Tonto Apaches, and came from the other side of the continent."

"You mean it was——?"

"Exactly. An Indian moccasin."

Meantime, Mr. Jerrold had been making hurried preparations, as he had fully determined that at any cost he would go with the regiment. He had been burning a number of letters, when Captain Armitage knocked and hurriedly entered. Jerrold pushed forward a chair and plunged at once into the matter at issue:

"There is no time to waste, captain. I have sent to you to ask what I can do to be released from arrest and permitted to go with the command."

"Answer the questions I put to you the other night, and certify to your answers; and of course you'll have to apologize to Captain Chester for your last night's language."

"That of course; though you will admit it looked like spying. Now let me ask you, did he tell you who the lady was?"

"No. I told him."

"How did you know?"

"By intuition, and my knowledge of previous circumstances."

"We have no time to discuss it. I make no attempt to conceal it now; but I ask that, on your honor, neither you nor he reveal it."

"And continue to let the garrison believe that you were in Miss Renwick's room that ghastly night?" asked Armitage, dryly.

Jerrold flushed: "I have denied that, and I would have proved my *alibi* could I have done so without betraying a woman's secret. Must I tell?"

"So far as I am concerned, Mr. Jerrold," said Armitage, with cold and relentless meaning, "you not only must tell—you must *prove*—both that night's doings and Saturday night's,—both that and how you obtained that photograph."

"My God! In one case it is a woman's name; in the other I have promised on honor not to reveal it."

"That ends it, then. You remain here in close arrest, and the charges against you will be pushed to the bitter end. I will write them this very hour."

XVI.

At ten o'clock that morning, shortly after a smiling interview with the ladies of Fort Sibley, in which, with infinite spirit and the most perfect self-control, Miss Beaubien had informed them that she had promised to lead with Mr. Jerrold, and, since he was in duress, she would lead with no one, and sent them off wondering and greatly excited, there came running up to the carriage a telegraph messenger boy, who handed her a despatch.

"I was going up to the avenue, mum," he explained, "but I seen you here."

Nina's face paled as she tore it open and read the curt lines:

"Come to me, here. Your help needed instantly."

She sprang from the carriage. "Tell mother I have gone over to see some Fort friends,—not to wait," she called to the coachman, well knowing he would understand that she meant the ladies with whom she had been so recently talking. Like a frightened deer she sped around the corner, hailed the driver of a cab, lounging with his fellows along the walk, ordered him to drive with all speed to Summit Avenue, and with beating heart decided on her plan. Her glorious eyes were flashing: the native courage and fierce determination of her race were working in her woman's heart. She well knew that imminent danger threatened him. She had dared everything for love of his mere presence, his sweet caress. What would she not dare to save him, if save she could? He had not been true to her. She knew, and knew well, that, whether sought or not, Alice Renwick had been winning him from her, that he was wavering, that he had been cold and negligent; but with all her soul and strength she loved him, and believed him grand and brave and fine as he was beautiful. Now—now was her opportunity. He needed her. His commission, his honor, depended on her. He had intimated as much the night before,—had told her of the accusations and suspicions that attached to him,—but made no mention of the photograph. He had said that though nothing could drag from him a word that would compromise *her*, *she* might be called upon to stand 'twixt him and ruin; and now perhaps the hour had come. She could free, exonerate, glorify him, and in doing so claim him for her

own. Who, after this, could stand 'twixt her and him? He loved her, though he *had* been cold; and she——? Had he bidden her bow her dusky head to earth and kiss the print of his heel, she would have obeyed could she but feel sure that her reward would be a simple touch of his hand, an assurance that no other woman could find a moment's place in his love. Verily, he had been doing desperate wooing in the long winter, for the very depths of her nature were all athrob with love for him. And now he could no longer plead that poverty withheld his offer of his hand. She would soon be mistress of her own little fortune, and, at her mother's death, of an independence. Go to him she would, and on wings of the wind, and go she did. The cab released her at the gate to her home, and went back with a double fare that set the driver to thinking. She sped through the house, and out the rear doors, much to the amaze of cook and others who were in consultation in the kitchen. She flew down a winding flight of stairs to the level below, and her fairy feet went tripping over the pavement of a plebeian street. A quick turn, and she was at a little second-rate stable, whose proprietor knew her and started from his chair.

"What's wrong to-day, Miss Nina?"

"I want the roan mare and light buggy again,—quick as you can. Your own price at the old terms, Mr. Graves,—silence."

He nodded, called to a subordinate, and in five minutes handed her into the frail vehicle. An impatient chirrup and flap of the reins, and the roan shot forth into the dusty road, leaving old Graves shaking his head at the door.

"I've known her ever since she was weaned," he muttered, "and she's a wild bird, if ever there was one, but she's never been the like o' this till last month."

And the roan mare was covered with foam and sweat when Nina Beaubien drove into the bustling fort, barely an hour after her receipt of Jerrold's telegram. A few officers were gathered in front of headquarters, and there were curious looks from face to face as she was recognized. Mr. Rollins was on the walk, giving some instructions to a sergeant of his company, and never saw her until the buggy reined up close behind him and, turning suddenly, he met her face to face as she sprang lightly to the ground. The young fellow reddened to his eyes, and would have recoiled, but she was mistress of the situation. She well knew she had but to command and he would obey, or, at the most, if she could no longer command she had only to implore, and he would be powerless to withstand her entreaty.

"I am glad *you* are here, Mr. Rollins. You can help me.—Sergeant, will you kindly hitch my horse at that post?—Now," she added, in low, hurried tone, "come with me to Mr. Jerrold's."

Rollins was too stupefied to answer. Silently he placed himself by her side, and together they passed the group at the office. Miss Beaubien nodded with something of her old archness and coquetry to the cap-raising party, but never hesitated. Together they passed along the narrow board walk, followed by curious eyes, and as they reached the angle and stepped beneath the shelter of the piazza in front of the long, low, green-blinded Bachelors' Row, there was sudden sensation in the

group. Mr. Jerrold appeared at the door of his quarters; Rollins halted some fifty feet away, raised his cap, and left her; and, all alone, with the eyes of Fort Sibley upon her, Nina Beaubien stepped bravely forward to meet her lover.

They saw him greet her at the door. Some of them turned away, unwilling to look, and yet unwilling to go and not understand this new phase of the mystery. Rollins, looking neither to right nor left, repassed them and walked off with a set, savage look on his young face, and then, as one or two still gazed, fascinated by this strange and daring proceeding, others, too, turned back and, half ashamed of themselves for such a yielding to curiosity, glanced furtively over at Jerrold's door.

There they stood,—he, restrained by his arrest, unable to come forth; she, restrained more by his barring form than by any consideration of maidenly reserve, for, had he bidden, she would have gone within. She had fully made up her mind that wherever he was, even were it behind the sentinels and bars of the guard-house, she would demand that she be taken to his side. He had handed out a chair, but she would not sit. They saw her looking up into his face as he talked, and noted the eager gesticulation, so characteristic of his Creole blood, that seemed to accompany his rapid words. They saw her bending towards him, looking eagerly up in his eyes, and occasionally casting indignant glances over towards the group at the office, as though she would annihilate with her wrath the persecutors of her hero. Then they saw her stretch forth both her hands with a quick impulsive movement, and grasp his one instant, looking so faithfully, steadfastly, loyally, into his clouded and anxious face. Then she turned, and with quick, eager steps came tripping towards them. They stood irresolute. Every man felt that it was somebody's duty to step forward, meet her, and be her escort though the party, but no one advanced. There was, if anything, a tendency to sidle towards the office door, as though to leave the sidewalk unimpeded. But she never sought to pass them by. With flashing eyes and crimson cheeks, she bore straight upon them, and, with indignant emphasis upon every word, accosted them:

"Captain Wilton, Major Sloat, I wish to see Captain Chester at once. Is he in the office?"

"Certainly, Miss Beaubien. Shall I call him? or will you walk in?" And both men were at her side in a moment.

"Thanks. I will go right in,—if you will kindly show me to him."

Another moment, and Armitage and Chester, deep in the midst of their duties and surrounded by clerks and orderlies and assailed by half a dozen questions in one and the same instant, looked up astonished as Wilton stepped in and announced Miss Beaubien desiring to see Captain Chester on immediate business. There was no time for conference. There she stood in the door-way, and all tongues were hushed on the instant. Chester rose and stepped forward with anxious courtesy. She did not choose to see the extended hand.

"It is you, alone, I wish to see, captain. Is it impossible here?"

"I fear it is, Miss Beaubien; but we can walk out in the open air.

I feel that I know what it is you wish to say to me," he added, in a low tone, took his cap from the peg on which it hung, and led the way. Again she passed through the curious but respectful group, and Jerrold, watching furtively from his window, saw them come forth.

The captain turned to her as soon as they were out of earshot:

"I have no daughter of my own, my dear young lady, but if I had I could not more thoroughly feel for you than I do. How can I help you?"

The reply was unexpectedly spirited. He had thought to encourage and sustain her, be sympathetic and paternal, but, as he afterwards ruefully admitted, he "never did seem to get the hang of a woman's temperament." Apparently sympathy was not the thing she needed.

"It is late in the day to ask such a question, Captain Chester. You have done great wrong and injustice. The question is now, will you undo it?"

He was too surprised to speak for a moment. When his tongue was unloosed he said,—

"I shall be glad to be convinced I was wrong."

"I know little of army justice or army laws, Captain Chester, but when a girl is compelled to take this step to rescue a friend there is something brutal about them,—or the men who enforce them. Mr. Jerrold tells me that he is arrested. I knew that last night, but not until this morning did he consent to let me know that he would be court-martialled unless he could prove where he was the night you were officer of the day two weeks ago, and last Saturday night. He is too noble and good to defend himself when by doing so he might harm me. But I am here to free him from the cruel suspicion you have formed." She had quickened her step, and in her impulsiveness and agitation they were almost at the end of the walk. He hesitated, as though reluctant to go along under the piazza, but she was imperious, and he yielded. "No, come!" she said. "I mean that you shall hear the whole truth, and that at once. I do not expect you to understand or condone my conduct, but you must acquit him. We are engaged; and —I love him. He has enemies here, as I see all too plainly, and they have prejudiced mother against him, and she has forbidden my seeing him. I came out to the fort without her knowledge one day, and it angered her. From that time she would not let me see him alone. She watched every movement, and came with me wherever I drove. She gave orders that I should never have any of our horses to drive or ride alone,—I, whom father had indulged to the utmost and who had ridden and driven at will from my babyhood. She came out to the fort with me that evening for parade, and never even agreed to let me go out to see some neighbors until she learned he was to escort Miss Renwick. She had ordered me to be ready to go with her to Chequamagon the next day, and I would not go until I had seen him. There had been a misunderstanding. I got the Suttons to drive me out while mother supposed me at the Laurents', and Mr. Jerrold promised to meet me east of the bridge and drive in town with us, and I was to send him back in Graves's buggy. He had been refused permission to leave the post, he said, and could not cross the bridge, where the sen-

tries would be sure to recognize him, but, as it was our last chance of meeting, he risked the discovery of his absence, never dreaming of such a thing as his private rooms being inspected. He had a little skiff down in the willows that he had used before, and by leaving the party at midnight he could get home, change his dress, run down the bank and row down-stream to the Point, there leave his skiff and climb up to the road. He met us there at one o'clock, and the Suttons would never betray either of us, though they did not know we were engaged. We sat in their parlor a quarter of an hour after we got to town, and then 'twas time to go, and there was only a little ten minutes' walk down to the stable. I had seen him such a very short time, and I had so much to tell him." (Chester could have burst into rapturous applause had she been an actress. Her cheeks were aflame, her eyes full of fire and spirit, her bosom heaving, her little foot tapping the ground, as she stood there leaning on the colonel's fence and looking straight up in the perturbed veteran's face. She was magnificent, he said to himself; and, in her bravery, self-sacrifice, and indignation, she *was*.) "It was then after two, and I could just as well go with him,—somebody had to bring the buggy back,—and Graves himself hitched in his roan mare for me, and I drove out, picked up Mr. Jerrold at the corner, and we came out here again through the darkness together. Even when we got to the Point I did not let him go at once. It was over an hour's drive. It was fully half-past three before we parted. He sprang down the path to reach the river-side; and before he was fairly in his boat and pulling up against the stream, I heard, far over here somewhere, those two faint shots. That was the shooting he spoke of in his letter to me,—not to her; and what business Colonel Maynard had to read and exhibit to his officers a letter never intended for him I cannot understand. Mr. Jerrold says it was not what he wanted it to be at all, as he wrote hastily, so he wrote another, and sent that to me by Merrick that morning after his absence was discovered. It probably blew out of the window, as these other things did this morning. See for yourself, captain." And she pointed to the two or three bills and scraps that had evidently only recently fluttered in among the now neglected roses. "Then when he was aroused at reveille and you threatened him with punishment and held over his head the startling accusation that you knew of our meeting and our secret, he was naturally infinitely distressed, and could only write to warn me, and he managed to get in and say good-by to me at the station. As for me, I was back home by five o'clock, let myself noiselessly up to my room, and no one knew it but the Suttons and old Graves, neither of whom would betray me. I had no fear of the long dark road: I had ridden and driven as a child all over these bluffs and prairies before there was any town worth mentioning, and in days when my father and I found only friends—not enemies—here at Sibley."

"Miss Beaubien, let me protest againt your accusation. It is not for me to reprove your grave imprudence or recklessness; nor have I the right to disapprove your choice of Mr. Jerrold. Let me say at once that you have none but friends here; and if it ever should be known to what lengths you went to save him, it will only make him

more envied and you more genuinely admired. I question your wisdom, but, upon my soul, I admire your bravery and spirit. You have cleared him of a terrible charge."

A most disdainful and impatient shrug of her shapely shoulders was Miss Beaubien's only answer to that allusion. The possibility of Mr. Jerrold's being suspected of another entanglement was something she would not tolerate:

"I know nothing of other people's affairs. I simply speak of my own. Let us end this as quickly as possible, captain. Now about Saturday night. Mother had consented to our coming back for the german,—she enjoys seeing me lead, it seems,—and she decided to pay a short visit to relations at St. Croix, staying there Saturday night and over Sunday. This would give us a chance to meet again, as he could spend the evening in St. Croix and return by late train, and I wrote and asked him. He came; we had a long talk in the summer-house in the garden, for mother never dreamed of his being there, and unluckily he just missed the night train and did not get back until inspection. It was impossible for him to have been at Sablon; and he can furnish other proof, but would do nothing until he had seen me."

"Miss Beaubien, you have cleared him. I only wish that you could clear—every one."

"I am in no wise concerned in that other matter to which you have alluded; neither is Mr. Jerrold. May I say to him at once that this ends his persecution?"

The captain smiled: "You certainly deserve to be the bearer of good tidings. I wish he may appreciate it."

Another moment, and she had left him and sped back to Jerrold's door-way. He was there to meet her, and Chester looked with grim and uncertain emotion at the radiance in her face. He had to get back to the office and to pass them: so, as civilly as he could, considering the weight of wrath and contempt he felt for the man, he stopped and spoke:

"Your fair advocate has been all-powerful, Mr. Jerrold. I congratulate you; and your arrest is at an end. Captain Armitage will require no duty of you until we are aboard; but we've only half an hour. The train is coming sharp at noon."

"Train! What train! Where are you going?" she asked, a wild anxiety in her eyes, a sudden pallor on her face.

"We are ordered post-haste to Colorado, Nina, to rescue what is left of Thornton's men. But for you I should have been left behind."

"But for me!—left behind!" she cried. "Oh, Howard, Howard! have I only—only won you to send you into danger? Oh, my darling! Oh, God! Don't—don't go! They will kill you! It will kill me! Oh, what have I done? what have I done?"

"Nina, hush! My honor is with the regiment. I *must* go, child. We'll be back in a few weeks. Indeed, I fear 'twill all be over before we get there. *Nina,* don't look so! Don't act so! Think where you are!"

But she had borne too much, and the blow came all too soon,—too heavy. She was wellnigh senseless when the Beaubien carriage came

whirling into the fort and old Maman rushed forth in voluble and rabid charge upon her daughter. All too late! it was useless now. Her darling's heart was weaned away, and her love lavished on that tall, objectionable young soldier so soon to go forth to battle. Reproaches, tears, wrath, were all in order, but were abandoned at sight of poor Nina's agony of grief. Noon came, and the train, and with buoyant tread the gallant command marched down the winding road and filed aboard the cars, and Howard Jerrold, shame-stricken, humbled at the contemplation of his own unworthiness, slowly unclasped her arms from about his neck, laid one long kiss upon her white and quivering lips, took one brief look in the great, dark, haunting, despairing eyes, and carried her wail of anguish ringing in his ears as he sprang aboard and was whirled away.

But there were women who deemed themselves worse off than Nina Beaubien,—the wives and daughters and sweethearts whom she met that morn in town; for when they got back to Sibley the regiment was miles away. For them there was not even a kiss from the lips of those they loved. Time and train waited for no woman. There were comrades battling for life in the Colorado Rockies, and aid could not come too soon.

XVII.

Under the cloudless heavens, under the starlit skies, blessing the grateful dew that cools the upland air and moistens the bunch-grass that has been bleaching all day in the fierce rays of the summer sun, a little column of infantry is swinging steadily southward. Long and toilsome has been the march; hot, dusty, and parching the day. Halts have been few and far between, and every man, from the colonel down, is coated with a gray mask of powdered alkali, the contribution of a two hours' tramp through Deadman's Cañon just before the sun went down. Now, however, they are climbing the range. The morrow will bring them to the broad and beautiful valley of the Spirit Wolf, and there they must have news. Officers and men are footsore and weary, but no one begs for rest. Colonel Maynard, riding ahead on a sorry hack he picked up at the station two days' long march behind them, is eager to reach the springs at Forest Glade before ordering bivouac for the night. A week agone no one who saw him at Sablon would have thought the colonel fit for a march like this; but he seems rejuvenate. His head is high, his eye as bright, his bearing as full of spirit, as man's could possibly be at sixty, and the whole regiment cheered him when he caught the column at Omaha. A talk with Chester and Armitage seemed to have made a new man of him, and to-night he is full of an energy that inspires the entire command. Though they were farther away than many other troops ordered to the scene, the fact that their station was on the railway and that they could be sent by special trains to Omaha and thence to the West enabled them to begin their rescue-march ahead of all the other foot-troops and behind only the powerful command of cavalry that was whirled to the scene the moment the authorities woke up to the fact that it should have been sent in the first place. Old Maynard would give his very ears to get

to Thornton's corral ahead of them, but the cavalry has thirty-six hours' start and four legs to two. Every moment he looks ahead expectant of tidings from the front that shall tell him the ——th were there and the remnant rescued. Even then, he knows, he and his long Springfields will be needed. The cavalry can fight their way in to the succor of the besieged, but once there will be themselves surrounded and too few in numbers to begin aggressive movements. He and his will indeed be welcome reinforcements; and so they trudge ahead.

The moon is up and it is nearly ten o'clock when high up on the rolling divide the springs are reached, and, barely waiting to quench their thirst in the cooling waters, the wearied men roll themselves in their blankets under the giant trees, and, guarded by a few outlying pickets, are soon asleep. Most of the officers have sprawled around a little fire and are burning their boot-leather thereat. The colonel, his adjutant, and the doctor are curled up under a tent-fly that serves by day as a wrap for the rations and cooking-kit they carry on pack-mule. Two company commanders,—the Alpha and Omega of the ten, as Major Sloat dubbed them,—the senior and junior in rank, Chester and Armitage by name, have rolled themselves in their blankets under another tent-fly and are chatting in low tones before dropping off to sleep. They have been inseparable on the journey thus far, and the colonel has had two or three long talks with them; but who knows what the morrow may bring forth? There is still much to settle.

One officer, he of the guard, is still afoot, and trudging about among the trees, looking after his sentries. Another officer, also alone, is sitting in silence smoking a pipe: it is Mr. Jerrold.

Cleared though he is of the charges originally brought against him in the minds of his colonel and Captain Chester, he has lost caste with his fellows and with them. Only two or three men have been made aware of the statement which acquitted him, but every one knows instinctively that he was saved by Nina Beaubien, and that in accepting his release at her hands he had put her to a cruel expense. Every man among his brother officers knows in some way that he has been acquitted of having compromised Alice Renwick's fair fame only by an *alibi* that correspondingly harmed another. The fact now generally known, that they were betrothed, and that the engagement was openly announced, made no difference. Without being able to analyze his conduct, the regiment was satisfied that it had been selfish and contemptible; and that was enough to warrant giving him the cold shoulder. He was quick to see and take the hint, and, in bitter distress of mind, to withdraw himself from their companionship. He had hoped and expected that his eagerness to go with them on the wild and sudden campaign would reinstate him in their good graces, but it failed utterly. "Any man would seek *that*," was the verdict of the informal council held by the officers. "He would have been a poltroon if he hadn't sought to go; but, while he isn't a poltroon, he has done a contemptible thing." And so it stood. Rollins had cut him dead, refused his hand, and denied him a chance to explain. "Tell him he can't explain," was the savage reply he sent by the adjutant, who consented to carry Jerrold's message in order that he might have fair play. "He knows,

without explanation, the wrong he has done to more than one. I won't have anything to do with him."

Others avoided him, and only coldly spoke to him when speech was necessary. Chester treated him with marked aversion; the colonel would not look at him; only Armitage—his captain—had a decent word for him at any time, and even he was stern and cold. The most envied and careless of the entire command, the Adonis, the beau, the crack shot, the graceful leader in all garrison gayeties, the beautiful dancer, rider, tennis-player, the adored of so many sentimental women at Sibley, poor Jerrold had found his level, and his proud and sensitive though selfish heart was breaking.

Sitting alone under the trees, he had taken a sheet of paper from his pocket-case and was writing by the light of the rising moon. One letter was short and easily written, for with a few words he had brought it to a close, then folded and in a bold and vigorous hand addressed it. The other was far longer; and over this one, thinking deeply, erasing some words and pondering much over others, he spent a long hour. It was nearly midnight, and he was chilled to the heart, when he stiffly rose and took his way among the blanketed groups to the camp-fire around which so many of his wearied comrades were sleeping the sleep of the tired soldier. Here he tore to fragments and scattered in the embers some notes and letters that were in his pockets. They blazed up brightly, and by the glare he stood one moment studying young Rollins's smooth and placid features; then he looked around on the unconscious circle of bronzed and bearded faces. There were many types of soldier there,—men who had led brigades through the great war and gone back to the humble bars of the line-officer at its close; men who had led fierce charges against the swarming Indians in the rough old days of the first prairie railways; men who had won distinction and honorable mention in hard and trying frontier service; men who had their faults and foibles and weaknesses like other men, and were aggressive or compliant, strong-willed or yielding, overbearing or meek, as are their brethren in other walks of life; men who were simple of heart, single in purpose and ambition, diverse in characteristics, but unanimous in one trait,—no meanness could live among them; and Jerrold's heart sank within him, colder, lower, stonier than before, as he looked from face to face and cast up mentally the sum of each man's character. His hospitality had been boundless, his bounty lavish; one and all they had eaten of his loaf and drunk of his cup; but was there among them one who could say of him, "He is generous and I stand his friend"? Was there one of them, one of theirs, for whom he had ever denied himself a pleasure, great or small? He looked at poor old Gray, with his wrinkled, anxious face, and thought of his distress of mind. Only a few thousands—not three years' pay—had the veteran scraped and saved and stored away for his little girl, whose heart was aching with its first cruel sorrow,—*his* work, *his* undoing, his cursed, selfish greed for adulation, his reckless love of love. The morrow's battle, if it came, might leave her orphaned and alone, and, poor as it was, a father's pitying sympathy could not be her help with the coming year. Would Gray mourn him if the fortune of war

made *him* the victim? Would any one of those averted faces look with pity and regret upon his stiffening form? Would there be any one on earth to whom his death would be a sorrow, but Nina? Would it even be a blow to her? She loved him wildly, he knew that; but *would* she did she but dream the truth? He knew her nature well. He knew how quickly such burning love could turn to fiercest hate when convinced that the object was utterly untrue. He had said nothing to her of the photograph, nothing at all of Alice except to protest time and again that his attentions to her were solely to win the good will of the colonel's family and of the colonel himself, so that he might be proof against the machinations of his foes. And yet had he not, that very night on which he crossed the stream and let her peril her name and honor for one stolen interview—had he not gone to her exultant welcome with a traitorous knowledge gnawing at his heart? That very night, before they parted at the colonel's door had he not lied to Alice Renwick?—had he not denied the story of his devotion to Miss Beaubien, and was not his practised eye watching eagerly the beautiful dark face for one sign that the news was welcome, and so precipitate the avowal trembling on his lips that it was *her* he madly loved,—not Nina? Though she hurriedly bade him good-night, though she was unprepared for any such announcement, he well knew that Alice Renwick's heart fluttered at the earnestness of his manner, and that he had indicated far more than he had said. Fear—not love—had drawn him to Nina Beaubien that night, and hope had centred on her more beautiful rival, when the discoveries of the night involved him in the first trembling symptoms of the downfall to come. And he was to have spent the morning with her, the woman to whom he had lied in word, while she to whom he had lied in word and deed was going from him, not to return until the german, and even then he planned treachery. He meant to lead with Alice Renwick and claim that it *must* be with the colonel's daughter because the ladies of the garrison were the givers. Then, he knew, Nina would not come at all, and, possibly, might quarrel with him on that ground. What could have been an easier solution of his troublous predicament? She would break their secret engagement; he would refuse all reconciliation, and be free to devote himself to Alice. But all these grave complications had arisen. Alice would not come. Nina wrote demanding that he should lead with her, and that he should meet her at St. Croix; and then came the crash. He owed his safety to her self-sacrifice, and now must give up all hope of Alice Renwick. He had accepted the announcement of their engagement. He *could* not do less, after all that had happened and the painful scene at their parting. And yet would it not be a blessing to her if he were killed? Even now in his self-abnegation and misery he did not fully realize how mean he was,—how mean he seemed to others. He resented in his heart what Sloat had said of him but the day before, little caring whether he heard it or not: "It would be a mercy to that poor girl if Jerrold were killed. He will break her heart with neglect, or drive her mad with jealousy, inside of a year." But the regiment seemed to agree with Sloat.

And so in all that little band of comrades he could call no man

friend. One after another he looked upon the unconscious faces, cold and averted in the oblivion of sleep, but not more cold, not more distrustful, than when he had vainly sought among them one relenting glance in the early moonlight that battle eve in bivouac. He threw his arms upward, shook his head with hopeless gesture, then buried his face in the sleeves of his rough campaign overcoat and strode blindly from their midst.

Early in the morning, an hour before daybreak, the shivering outpost crouching in a hollow to the southward catch sight of two dim figures shooting suddenly up over a distant ridge,—horsemen, they know at a glance,—and these two come loping down the moonlit trail over which two nights before had marched the cavalry speeding to the rescue, over which in an hour the regiment itself must be on the move. Old campaigners are two of the picket, and they have been especially cautioned to be on the lookout for couriers coming back along the trail. They spring to their feet, in readiness to welcome or repel, as the sentry rings out his sharp and sudden challenge.

"Couriers from the corral," is the jubilant answer. "This Colonel Maynard's outfit?"

"Ay, ay, sonny," is the unmilitary but characteristic answer. "What's your news?"

"Got there in time, and saved what's left of 'em; but it's a hell-hole, and you fellows are wanted quick as you can come,—thirty miles ahead. Where's the colonel?"

The corporal of the guard goes back to the bivouac, leading the two arrivals. One is a scout, a plainsman born and bred, the other a sergeant of cavalry. They dismount in the timber and picket their horses, then follow on foot the lead of their companion of the guard. While the corporal and the scout proceed to the wagon-fly and fumble at the opening, the tall sergeant stands silently a little distance in their rear, and the occupants of a neighboring shelter—the counterpart of the colonel's—begin to stir, as though their light slumber had been broken by the smothered sound of footsteps. One of them sits up and peers out at the front, gazing earnestly at the tall figure standing easily there in the flickering light. Then he hails in low tones:

"That you, Mr. Jerrold? What is the matter?"

And the tall figure faces promptly towards the hailing voice. The spurred heels come together with a click, the gauntleted hand rises in soldierly salute to the broad brim of the scouting-hat, and a deep voice answers, respectfully,—

"It is not Mr. Jerrold, sir. It is Sergeant McLeod, ——th Cavalry, just in with despatches."

Armitage springs to his feet, sheds his shell of blankets, and steps forth into the glade with his eyes fixed eagerly on the shadowy form in front. He peers under the broad brim, as though striving to see the eyes and features of the tall dragoon.

"Did you get there in time?" he asks, half wondering whether that was really the question uppermost in his mind.

"In time to save the survivors, sir; but no attack will be made until the infantry get there."

"Were you not at Sibley last month?" asks the captain, quickly.

"Yes, sir,—with the competitors."

"You went back before your regimental team, did you not?"

"I—— No, sir: I went back with them."

"You were relieved from duty at Sibley and ordered back before them, were you not?"

Even in the pallid light Armitage could see the hesitation, the flurry of surprise and distress, in the sergeant's face.

"Don't fear to tell me, man: I would rather hear it than any news you could give me. I would rather know you were *not* Sergeant McLeod than any fact you could tell. Speak low, man, but tell me here and now. Whatever motive you may have had for this disguise, whatever anger or sorrows in the past, you must sink them now to save the honor of the woman your madness has perilled. Answer me, for your sister's sake: are you not Fred Renwick?"

"Do you swear to me she is in danger?"

"By all that's sacred; and you ought to know it."

"I *am* Fred Renwick. Now what can I do?"

XVIII.

The sun is not an hour high, but the bivouac at the springs is far behind. With advance-guard and flankers well out, the regiment is tramping its way, full of eagerness and spirit. The men can hardly refrain from bursting into song, but, although at "route step," the fact that Indian scouts have already been sighted scurrying from bluff to bluff is sufficient to warn all hands to be silent and alert. Wilton with his company is on the dangerous flank, and guards it well. Armitage with Company B covers the advance, and his men are strung out in long skirmish-line across the trail wherever the ground is sufficiently open to admit of deployment. Where it is not, they spring ahead and explore every point where Indian may lurk, and render ambuscade of the main column impossible. With Armitage is McLeod, the cavalry sergeant who made the night ride with the scout who bore the despatches. The scout has galloped on towards the railway with news of the rescue, the sergeant guides the infantry reinforcement. Observant men have noted that Armitage and the sergeant have had a vast deal to say to each other during the chill hours of the early morn. Others have noted that at the first brief halt the captain rode back, called Colonel Maynard to one side, and spoke to him in low tones. The colonel was seen to start with astonishment. Then he said a few words to his second in command, and rode forward with Armitage to join the advance. When the regiment moved on again and the head of column hove in sight of the skirmishers, they saw that the colonel, Armitage, and the sergeant of cavalry were riding side by side, and that the officers were paying close attention to all the dragoon was saying. All were eager to hear the particulars of the condition of affairs at the corral, and all were disposed to be envious of the mounted captain who could ride alongside the one participant in the rescuing charge and get it all at first hand. The field-officers, of course, were mounted, but every

line-officer marched afoot with his men, except that three horses had been picked up at the railway and impressed by the quartermaster in case of need, and these were assigned to the captains who happened to command the skirmishers and flankers.

But no man had the faintest idea what manner of story that tall sergeant was telling. It would have been of interest to every soldier in the command, but to no one so much so as to the two who were his absorbed listeners. Armitage, before their early march, had frankly and briefly set before him his suspicions as to the case, and the trouble in which Miss Renwick was involved. No time was to be lost. Any moment might find them plunged in fierce battle; and who could foretell the results?—who could say what might happen to prevent this her vindication ever reaching the ears of her accusers? Some men wondered why it was that Colonel Maynard sent his compliments to Captain Chester and begged that at the next halt he would join him. The halt did not come for a long hour, and when it did come it was very brief, but Chester received another message, and went forward to find his colonel sitting in a little grove with the cavalryman, while the orderly held their horses a short space away. Armitage had gone forward to his advance, and Chester showed no surprise at the sight of the sergeant seated side by side with the colonel and in confidential converse with him. There was a quaint, sly twinkle in Maynard's eyes as he greeted his old friend.

"Chester," said he, "I want you to be better acquainted with my step-son, Mr. Renwick. He has an apology to make to you."

The tall soldier had risen the instant he caught sight of the newcomer, and even at the half-playful tone of the colonel would relax in no degree his soldierly sense of the proprieties. He stood erect and held his hand at the salute, only very slowly lowering it to take the one so frankly extended him by the captain, who, however, was grave and quiet.

"I have suspected as much since daybreak," he said; "and no man is gladder to know it *is* you than I am."

"You would have known it before, sir, had I had the faintest idea of the danger in which my foolhardiness had involved my sister. The colonel has told you of my story. I have told him and Captain Armitage what led to my mad freak at Sibley; and, while I have much to make amends for, I want to apologize for the blow I gave you that night on the terrace. I was far more scared than you were, sir."

"I think we can afford to forgive him, Chester. He knocked us both out," said the colonel.

Chester bowed gravely. "That was the easiest part of the affair to forgive," he said, "and it is hardly for me, I presume, to be the only one to blame the sergeant for the trouble that has involved us all, especially your household, colonel."

"It was expensive masquerading, to say the least," replied the colonel; "but he never realized the consequences until Armitage told him to-day. You must hear his story in brief, Chester. It is needful that three or four of us know it, so that some may be left to set things right

at Sibley. God grant us all safe return!" he added, piously, and with deep emotion. "I can far better appreciate our home and happiness than I could a month ago. Now, Renwick, tell the captain what you have told us."

And briefly it *was* told: how in his youthful fury he had sworn never again to set foot within the door of the father and mother who had so wronged the poor girl he loved with boyish fervor; how he called down the vengeance of heaven upon them in his frenzy and distress; how he had sworn never again to set eyes on their faces. "May God strike me dead if ever I return to this roof until she is avenged! May He deal with you as you have dealt with her!" was the curse that flew from his wild lips, and with that he left them, stunned. He went West, was soon penniless, and, caring not what he did, seeking change, adventure, anything to take him out of his past, he enlisted in the cavalry, and was speedily drafted to the ——th, which was just starting forth on a stirring summer campaign. He was a fine horseman, a fine shot, a man who instantly attracted the notice of his officers: the campaign was full of danger, adventure, rapid and constant marching, and before he knew it or dreamed it possible he had become deeply interested in his new life. Only in the monotony of a month or two in garrison that winter did the service seem intolerable. His comrades were rough, in the main, but thoroughly good-hearted, and he soon won their esteem. The spring sent them again into the field; another stirring campaign, and here he won his stripes, and words of praise from the lips of a veteran general officer, as well as the promise of future reward; and then the love of soldierly deeds and the thirst for soldierly renown took firm hold in his breast. He began to turn towards the mother and father who had been wrapped up in his future,—who loved him so devotedly. He was forgetting his early and passionate love, and the bitter sorrow of her death was losing fast its poignant power to steel him against his kindred. He knew they could not but be proud of the record he had made in the ranks of the gallant ——th, and then he shrank and shivered when he recalled the dreadful words of his curse. He had made up his mind to write, implore pardon for his hideous and unfilial language, and invoke their interest in his career, when, returning to Fort Raines for supplies, he picked up a New York paper in the reading-room and read the announcement of his father's death, "whose health had been broken ever since the disappearance of his only son, two years before." The memory of his malediction had, indeed, come home to him, and he fell, stricken by a sudden and unaccountable blow. It seemed as though his heart had given one wild leap, then stopped forever. Things did not go so well after this. He brooded over his words, and believed that an avenging God had launched the bolt that killed the father as punishment to the stubborn and recreant son. He then bethought him of his mother, of pretty Alice, who had loved him so as a little girl. He could not bring himself to write, but through inquiries he learned that the house was closed and that they had gone abroad. He plodded on in his duties a trying year: then came more lively field-work and reviving interest. He was forgetting entirely the sting of his first great sorrow, and

mourning gravely the gulf he had placed 'twixt him and his. He thought time and again of his cruel words, and something began to whisper to him he must see that mother again at once, kiss her hand, and implore her forgiveness, or she, too, would be stricken suddenly. He saved up his money, hoping that after the summer's rifle-work at Sibley he might get a furlough and go East; and the night he arrived at the fort, tired with his long railway-journey and panting after a long and difficult climb up-hill, his mother's face swam suddenly before his eyes, and he felt himself going down. When they brought him to, he heard that the ladies were Mrs. Maynard and her daughter Miss Renwick,—his own mother, remarried, his own Alice, a grown young woman. This was, indeed, news to put him in a flutter and spoil his shooting. He realized at once that the gulf was wider than ever. How could he go to her now, the wife of a colonel, and he an enlisted man? Like other soldiers, he forgot that the line of demarcation was one of discipline, not of sympathy. He did not realize what any soldier among his officers would gladly have told him, that he was most worthy to reveal himself now,—a non-commissioned officer whose record was an honor to himself and to his regiment, a soldier of whom officers and comrades alike were proud. He never dreamed—indeed, how few there are who do!—that a man of his character, standing, and ability is honored and respected by the very men whom the customs of the service require him to speak with only when spoken to. He supposed that only as Fred Renwick could he extend his hand to one of their number, whereas it was under his soldier name he won their trust and admiration, and it was as Sergeant McLeod the officers of the ——th were backing him for a commission that would make him what they deemed him fit to be,—their equal. Unable to penetrate the armor of reserve and discipline which separates the officer from the rank and file, he never imagined that the colonel would have been the first to welcome him had he known the truth. He believed that *now* his last chance of seeing his mother was gone until that coveted commission was won. Then came another blow: the doctor told him that with his heart-trouble he could never pass the physical examination: he could not hope for preferment, then, and *must* see her as he was, and see her secretly and alone. Then came blow after blow. His shooting had failed, so had that of others of his regiment, and he was ordered to return in charge of the party early on the morrow. The order reached him late in the evening, and before breakfast-time on the following day he was directed to start with his party for town, thence by rail to his distant post. That night, in desperation, he made his plan. Twice before he had strolled down to the post and with yearning eyes had studied every feature of the colonel's house. He dared ask no questions of servants or of the men in garrison, but he learned enough to know which rooms were theirs, and he had noted that the windows were always open. If he could only see their loved faces, kneel and kiss his mother's hand, pray God to forgive him, he could go away believing that he had undone the spell and revoked the malediction of his early youth. It was hazardous, but worth the danger. He could go in peace and sin no more towards mother, at least; and then

if she mourned and missed him, could he not find it out some day and make himself known to her after his discharge? He slipped out of camp, leaving his boots behind, and wearing his light Apache moccasins and flannel shirt and trousers. Danger to himself he had no great fear of. If by any chance mother or sister should wake, he had but to stretch forth his hand and say, "It is only I,—Fred." Danger to *them* he never dreamed of.

Strong and athletic, despite his slender frame, he easily lifted the ladder from Jerrold's fence, and, dodging the sentry when he spied him at the gate, finally took it down back of the colonel's and raised it to a rear window. By the strangest chance the window was closed, and he could not budge it. Then he heard the challenge of a sentry around on the east front, and had just time to slip down and lower the ladder when he heard the rattle of a sword and knew it must be the officer of the day. There was no time to carry off the ladder. He left it lying where it was, and sprang down the steps towards the station. Soon he heard Number Five challenge, and knew the officer had passed on: he waited some time, but nothing occurred to indicate that the ladder was discovered, and then, plucking up courage and with a muttered prayer for guidance and protection, he stole up-hill again, raised the ladder to the west wall, noiselessly ascended, peered in Alice's window and could see a faint night-light burning in the hall beyond, but that all was darkness there, stole around on the roof of the piazza to the hall window, stepped noiselessly upon the sill, climbed over the lowered sash, and found himself midway between the rooms. He could hear the colonel's placid snoring and the regular breathing of the other sleepers. No time was to be lost. Shading the little night-lamp with one hand, he entered the open door, stole to the bedside, took one long look at his mother's face, knelt, breathed upon, but barely brushed with his trembling lips, the queenly white hand that lay upon the coverlet, poured forth one brief prayer to God for protection and blessing for her and forgiveness for him, retraced his steps, and caught sight of the lovely picture of Alice in the Directoire costume. He longed for it and could not resist. She had grown so beautiful, so exquisite. He took it, frame and all, carried it into her room, slipped the card from its place and hid it inside the breast of his shirt, stowed the frame away behind her sofa-pillow, then looked long at the lovely picture she herself made, lying there sleeping sweetly and peacefully amid the white drapings of her dainty bed. Then 'twas time to go. He put the lamp back in the hall, passed through her room, out at her window, and down the ladder, and had it well on the way back to the hooks on Jerrold's fence when seized and challenged by the officer of the day. Mad terror possessed him then. He struck blindly, dashed off in panicky flight, paid no heed to sentry's cry or whistling missile, but tore like a racer up the path and never slackened speed till Sibley was far behind.

When morning came, the order that they should go was temporarily suspended: some prisoners were sent to a neighboring military prison, and he was placed in charge, and on his return from this duty learned that the colonel's family had gone to Sablon. The next thing there

was some strange talk that worried him,—a story that one of the men who had a sweetheart who was second girl at Mrs. Hoyt's brought out to camp,—a story that there was an officer who was too much in love with Alice to keep away from the house even after the colonel so ordered, and that he was prowling around the other night and the colonel ordered Leary to shoot him,—Leary, who was on post on Number Five. He felt sure that something was wrong,—felt sure that it was due to his night visit,—and his first impulse was to find his mother and confide the truth to her. He longed to see her again, and, if harm had been done, to make himself known and explain everything. Having no duties to detain him, he got a pass to visit town and permission to be gone a day or more. On Saturday evening he ran down to Sablon, drove over, as Captain Armitage had already told them, and, peering in his mother's room, saw her, still up, though in her night-dress. He never dreamed of the colonel's being out and watching. He had "scouted" all those trees, and no one was nigh. Then he softly called; she heard, and was coming to him, when again came fierce attack: he had all a soldier's reverence for the person of the colonel, and would never have harmed him had he known 'twas he: it was the night watchman that had grappled with him, he supposed, and he had no compunctions in sending him to grass. Then he fled again, knowing that he had only made bad worse, walked all that night to the station next north of Sablon,—a big town where the early morning train always stopped,—and by ten on Sunday morning he was in uniform again and off with his regimental comrades under orders to haste to their station,—there was trouble with the Indians at Spirit Rock and the ——th were held in readiness. From beneath his scouting-shirt he drew a flat packet, an Indian case, which he carefully unrolled, and there in its folds of wrappings was the lovely Directoire photograph.

Whose, then, was the one that Sloat had seen in Jerrold's room? It was this that Armitage had gone forward to determine, and he found his sad-eyed lieutenant with the skirmishers.

"Jerrold," said he, with softened manner, "a strange thing is brought to light this morning, and I lose no time in telling you. The man who was seen at Maynard's quarters, coming from Miss Renwick's room, was her own brother and the colonel's step-son. He was the man who took the photograph from Mrs. Maynard's room, and has proved it this very day,—this very hour." Jerrold glanced up in sudden surprise. "He is with us now, and only one thing remains, which you can clear up. We are going into action, and I may not get through, nor you, nor—who knows who? Will you tell us now how you came by your copy of that photograph?"

For answer Jerrold fumbled in his pocket a moment and drew forth two letters:

"I wrote these last night, and it was my intention to see that you had them before it grew very hot. One is addressed to you, the other to Miss Beaubien. You had better take them now," he said, wearily. "There may be no time to talk after this. Send hers after it's over, and don't read yours until then."

"Why, I don't understand this, exactly," said Armitage, puzzled. "Can't you tell me about the picture?"

"No. I promised not to while I lived; but it's the simplest matter in the world, and no one at the colonel's had any hand in it. They never saw this one that I got to show Sloat. It is burned now. I said 'twas given me. That was hardly the truth. I have paid for it dearly enough."

"And this note explains it?"

"Yes. You can read it to-morrow."

XIX.

And the morrow has come. Down in a deep and bluff-shadowed valley, hung all around with picturesque crags and pine-crested heights, under a cloudless September sun whose warmth is tempered by the mountain-breeze, a thousand rough-looking, bronzed and bearded and powder-blackened men are resting after battle.

Here and there on distant ridge and point the cavalry vedettes keep vigilant watch against surprise or renewed attack. Down along the banks of a clear, purling stream a sentry paces slowly by the brown line of rifles, swivel-stacked in the sunshine. Men by the dozen are washing their blistered feet and grimy hands and faces in the cool, refreshing water; men by the dozen lie soundly sleeping, some in the broad glare, some in the shade of the little clump of willows, all heedless of the pestering swarms of flies. Out on the broad, grassy slopes, side-lined and watched by keen-eyed guards, the herds of cavalry horses are quietly grazing, forgetful of the wild excitement of yester-even. Every now and then some one of them lifts his head, pricks up his ears, and snorts and stamps suspiciously as he sniffs at the puffs of smoke that come drifting up the valley from the fires a mile away. The waking men, too, bestow an occasional comment on the odor which greets their nostrils. Down-stream where the fires are burning are the blackened remnants of a wagon-train: tires, bolts, and axles are lying about, but all wood-work is in smouldering ashes; so, too, is all that remains of several hundred-weight of stores and supplies destined originally to nourish the Indians, but, by them, diverted to feed the fire.

There is a big circle of seething flame and rolling smoke here, too, —a malodorous neighborhood, around which fatigue-parties are working with averted heads; and among them some surly and unwilling Indians, driven to labor at the muzzle of threatening revolver or carbine, aid in dragging to the flames carcass after carcass of horse and mule, and in gathering together and throwing on the pyre an array of miscellaneous soldier garments, blouses, shirts, and trousers, all more or less hacked and blood-stained,—all of no more use to mortal wearer.

Out on the southern slopes, just where a ravine crowded with wild-rose bushes opens into the valley, more than half the command is gathered, formed in rectangular lines about a number of shallow, elongated pits, in each of which there lies the stiffening form of a comrade who but yesterday joined in the battle-cheer that burst upon the valley with

the setting sun. Silent and reverent they stand in their rough campaign garb. The escort of infantry "rests on arms;" the others bow their uncovered heads, and it is the voice of the veteran colonel that, in accents trembling with sympathy and emotion, renders the last tribute to fallen comrades and lifts to heaven the prayers for the dead. Then see! The mourning groups break away from the southern side; the brown rifles of the escort are lifted in air; the listening rocks resound to the sudden ring of the flashing volley; the soft, low, wailing good-by of the trumpets goes floating up the vale, and soon the burial-parties are left alone to cover the once familiar faces with the earth to which the soldier must return, and the comrades who are left, foot and dragoon, come marching, silent, back to camp.

And when the old regiment begins its homeward journey, leaving the well-won field to the fast-arriving commands and bidding hearty soldier farewell to the cavalry comrades whose friendship they gained in the front of a savage foe, the company that was the first to land its fire in the fight goes back with diminished numbers and under command of its second lieutenant. Alas, poor Jerrold!

There is a solemn little group around the camp-fire the night before they go. Frank Armitage, flat on his back, with a rifle-bullet through his thigh, but taking things very coolly for all that, is having a quiet conference with his colonel. Such of the wounded of the entire command as are well enough to travel by easy stages to the railway go with Maynard and the regiment in the morning, and Sergeant McLeod, with his sabre-arm in a sling, is one of these. But the captain of Company B must wait until the surgeons can lift him along in an ambulance and all fear of fever has subsided. To the colonel and Chester he hands the note which is all that is left to comfort poor Nina Beaubien. To them he reads aloud the note addressed to himself:

"You are right in saying that the matter of my possession of that photograph should be explained. I seek no longer to palliate my action. In making that puppyish bet with Sloat I *did* believe that I could induce Miss Renwick or her mother to let me have a copy; but I was refused so positively that I knew it was useless. This simply added to my desire to have one. The photographer was the same that took the pictures and furnished the albums for our class at graduation, and I, more than any one, had been instrumental in getting the order for him against very active opposition. He had always professed the greatest gratitude to me and a willingness to do anything for me. I wrote to him in strict confidence, told him of the intimate and close relations existing between the colonel's family and me, told him I wanted it to enlarge and present to her mother on her approaching birthday, and promised him that I would never reveal how I came by the picture so long as I lived; and he sent me one,—just in time. Have I not paid heavily for my sin?"

No one spoke for a moment. Chester was the first to break the silence:

"Poor fellow! He kept his word to the photographer; but what was it worth to a woman?"

There had been a week of wild anxiety and excitement at Sibley.

It was known through the columns of the press that the regiment had hurried forward from the railway the instant it reached the Colorado trail, that it could not hope to get through to the valley of the Spirit Wolf without a fight, and that the moment it succeeded in joining hands with the cavalry already there a vigorous attack would be made on the Indians. The news of the rescue of the survivors of Thornton's command came first, and with it the tidings that Maynard and his regiment were met only thirty miles from the scene and were pushing forward. The next news came two days later, and a wail went up even while men were shaking hands and rejoicing over the gallant fight that had been made, and women were weeping for joy and thanking God that those whom they held dearest were safe. It was down among the wives of the sergeants and other veterans that the blow struck hardest at Sibley; for the stricken officers were unmarried men, while among the rank and file there were several who never came back to the little ones who bore their name. Company B had suffered most, for the Indians had charged fiercely on its deployed but steadfast line. Armitage almost choked and broke down when telling the colonel about it that night as he lay under the willows: "It was the first smile I had seen on his face since I got back,—that with which he looked up in my eyes and whispered good-by,—and died,—just after we drove them back. My turn came later." Old Sloat, too, "had his customary crack," as he expressed it,—a shot through the wrist that made him hop and swear savagely until some of the men got to laughing at the comical figure he cut, and then he turned and damned them with hearty good will, and seemed all oblivious of the bullets that went zipping past his frosting head. Young Rollins, to his inexpressible pride and comfort, had a bullet-hole through his scouting-hat and another through his shoulder-strap that raised a big welt on the white skin beneath, but, to the detriment of promotion, no captain was killed, and Jerrold gave the only file.

The one question at Sibley was, "What will Nina Beaubien do?"

She did nothing. She would see nobody from the instant the news came. She had hardly slept at night,—was always awake at dawn and out at the gate to get the earliest copy of the morning papers; but the news reached them at nightfall, and when some of the ladies from the fort drove in to offer their sympathy and condolence in the morning, and to make tender inquiry, the answer at the door was that Miss Nina saw nobody, that her mother alone was with her, and that "she was very still." And so it went for some days. Then there came the return of the command to Sibley; and hundreds of people went up from town to see the six companies of the fort garrison march up the winding road amid the thunder of welcome from the guns of the light battery and the exultant strains of the band. Mrs. Maynard and Alice were the only ladies of the circle who were not there: a son and brother had joined them, after long absence, at Aunt Grace's cottage at Sablon, was the explanation, and the colonel would bring them home in a few days, after he had attended to some important matters at the fort. In the first place, Chester had to see to it that the tongue of scandal was slit, so far as the colonel's household was concerned, and

all good people notified that no such thing had happened as was popularly supposed (and "everybody" received the announcement with the remark that she knew all along it couldn't be so), and that a grievous and absurd but most mortifying blunder had been made. It was a most unpleasant ghost to "down," the shadow of that scandal, for it would come up to the surface of garrison chat at all manner of confidential moments; but no man or woman could safely speak of it to Chester. It was gradually assumed that he was the man who had done all the blundering and that he was supersensitive on the subject.

There was another thing never satisfactorily explained to some of the garrison people, and that was Nina Beaubien's strange conduct. In less than a week she was seen on the street in colors,—brilliant colors,—when it was known she had ordered deep mourning, and then she suddenly disappeared and went with her silent old mother abroad. To this day no woman in society understands it, for when she came back, long, long afterwards, it was a subject on which she would never speak. There were one or two who ventured to ask, and the answer was, "For reasons that concern me alone." But it took no great power of mental vision to see that her heart wore black for him forever.

His letter explained it all. She had received it with a paroxysm of passionate grief and joy, kissed it, covered it with wildest caresses before she began to read, and then, little by little, as the words unfolded before her staring eyes, turned cold as stone:

"It is my last night of life, Nina, and I am glad 'tis so. Proud and sensitive as I am, the knowledge that every man in my regiment has turned from me,—that I have not a friend among them,—that there is no longer a place for me in their midst,—more than all, that I *deserve* their contempt,—has broken my heart. We will be in battle before the setting of another sun. Any man who seeks death in Indian fight can find it easily enough, and I can *compel* their respect in spite of themselves. They will not recognize me, living, as one of them; but dying on the field, they have to place me on their roll of honor.

"But now I turn to you. What have I been,—what am I,—to have won such love as yours? May God in heaven forgive me for my past! All too late I hate and despise the man I have been,—the man whom you loved. One last act of justice remains. If I died without it you would mourn me faithfully, tenderly, lovingly, for years, but if I tell the truth you will see the utter unworthiness of the man, and your love will turn to contempt. It is hard to do this, knowing that in doing it I kill the only genuine regret and dry the only tear that would bless my memory; but it is the one sacrifice I can make to complete my self-humiliation, and it is the one thing that is left me that will free you. It will sting at first, but, like the surgeon's knife, its cut is mercy. Nina, the very night I came to you on the bluffs, the very night you perilled your honor to have that parting interview, I went to you with a lie on my lips. I had told *her* we were nothing to each other,—you and I. More than that, I was seeking her love; I hoped I could win her; and had she loved me I would have turned from you to make her my wife. Nina, I loved Alice Renwick. Good-by. Don't mourn for me after this."

XX.

They were having a family conclave at Sablon. The furlough granted Sergeant McLeod on account of wound received in action with hostile Indians would soon expire, and the question was, should he ask an extension, apply for a discharge, or go back and rejoin his troop? It was a matter on which there was much diversity of opinion. Mrs. Maynard should naturally be permitted first choice, and to her wish there was every reason for according deep and tender consideration. No words can tell of the rapture of that reunion with her long-lost son. It was a scene over which the colonel could never ponder without deep emotion. The telegrams and letters by which he carefully prepared her for Frederick's coming were all insufficient. She knew well that her boy must have greatly changed and matured, but when this tall, bronzed, bearded, stalwart man sprang from the old red omnibus and threw his one serviceable arm around her trembling form, the mother was utterly overcome. Alice left them alone together a full hour before even she intruded, and little by little, as the days went by and Mrs. Maynard realized that it was really her Fred who was whistling about the cottage or booming trooper songs in his great basso profundo, and glorying in his regiment and the cavalry life he had led, a wonderful content and joy shone in her handsome face. It was not until the colonel announced that it was about time for them to think of going back to Sibley that the cloud came. Fred said *he* couldn't go.

In fact, the colonel himself had been worrying a little over it. As Fred Renwick, the tall distinguished young man in civilian costume, he would be welcome anywhere; but, though his garb was that of the sovereign citizen so long as his furlough lasted, there were but two weeks more of it left, and officially he was nothing more nor less than Sergeant McLeod, Troop B, ——th Cavalry, and there was no precedent for a colonel's entertaining as an honored guest and social equal one of the enlisted men of the army. He rather hoped that Fred would yield to his mother's entreaties and apply for a discharge. His wound and the latent trouble with his heart would probably render it an easy matter to obtain; and yet he was ashamed of himself for the feeling.

Then there was Alice. It was hardly to be supposed that so very high bred a young woman would relish the idea of being seen around Fort Sibley on the arm of her brother the sergeant; but, wonderful to relate, Miss Alice took a radically different view of the whole situation. So far from wishing Fred out of the army, she importuned him day after day until he got out his best uniform, with its resplendent chevrons and stripes of vivid yellow, and the yellow helmet-cords, though they were but humble worsted, and when he came forth in that dress, with the bronze medal on his left breast and the sharpshooter's silver cross, his tall athletic figure showing to such advantage, his dark, Southern, manly features so enhanced by contrast with his yellow facings, she clapped her hands with a cry of delight and sprang into his one available arm and threw her own about his neck and kissed him again and again. Even mamma had to admit he looked astonishingly well; but Alice declared she would never thereafter be reconciled to seeing him in

anything but a cavalry uniform. The colonel found her not at all of her mother's way of thinking. She saw no reason why Fred should leave the service. Other sergeants had won their commissions every year: why not he? Even if it were some time in coming, was there shame or degradation in being a cavalry sergeant? Not a bit of it! Fred himself was loath to quit. He was getting a little homesick, too, —homesick for the boundless life and space and air of the broad frontier,—homesick for the rapid movement and vigorous hours in the saddle and on the scout. His arm was healing, and such a delight of a letter had come from his captain, telling him that the adjutant had just been to see him about the new staff of the regiment. The gallant sergeant-major, a young Prussian of marked ability, had been killed early in the campaign; the vacancy must soon be filled, and the colonel and the adjutant both thought at once of Sergeant McLeod. "I won't stand in your way, sergeant," wrote his troop commander, "but you know that old Ryan is to be discharged at the end of his sixth enlistment the 10th of next month; there is no man I would sooner see in his place as first sergeant of my troop than yourself, and I hate to lose you; but, as it will be for the gain and the good of the whole regiment, you ought to accept the adjutant's offer. All the men rejoice to hear you are recovering so fast, and all will be glad to see Sergeant McLeod back again."

Even Mrs. Maynard could not but see the pride and comfort this letter gave her son. Her own longing was to have him established in some business in the East; but he said frankly he had no taste for it, and would only pine for the old life in the saddle. There were other reasons, too, said he, why he felt that he could not go back to New York, and his voice trembled, and Mrs. Maynard said no more. It was the sole allusion he had made to the old, old sorrow, but it was plain that the recovery was incomplete. The colonel and the doctor at Sibley believed that Fred could be carried past the medical board by a little management, and everything began to look as though he would have his way. All they were waiting for, said the colonel, was to hear from Armitage. He was still at Fort Russell with the head-quarters and several troops of the ——th Cavalry: his wound was too severe for him to travel farther for weeks to come, but he could write, and he had been consulted. They were sitting under the broad piazza at Sablon, looking out at the lovely, placid lake, and talking it over among themselves.

"I have always leaned on Armitage ever since I first came to the regiment and found him adjutant," said the colonel. "I always found his judgment clear; but since our last experience I have begun to look upon him as infallible."

Alice Renwick's face took on a flood of crimson as she sat there by her brother's side, silent and attentive. Only within the week that followed their return—the colonel's and her brother's—had the story of the strange complication been revealed to them. Twice had she heard from Fred's lips the story of Frank Armitage's greeting that frosty morning at the springs. Time and again had she made her mother go over the colonel's account of the confidence and faith he had expressed

in there being a simple explanation of the whole mystery, and of his indignant refusal to attach one moment's suspicion to her. Shocked, stunned, outraged as she felt at the mere fact that such a story had gained an instant's credence in garrison circles, she was overwhelmed by the weight of circumstantial evidence that had been arrayed against her. Only little by little did her mother reveal it to her. Only after several days did Fred repeat the story of his night adventure and his theft of her picture, of his narrow escape, and of his subsequent visit to the cottage. Only gradually had her mother revealed to her the circumstances of Jerrold's wager with Sloat, and the direful consequences; of his double absences the very nights on which Fred had made his visits; of the suspicions that resulted, the accusations, and his refusal to explain and clear her name. Mrs. Maynard felt vaguely relieved to see how slight an impression the young man had made on her daughter's heart. Alice seemed but little surprised to hear of the engagement to Nina Beaubien, of her rush to his rescue, and their romantic parting. The tragedy of his death hushed all further talk on that subject. There was one on which she could not hear enough, and that was about the man who had been most instrumental in the rescue of her name and honor. Alice had only tender sorrow and no reproach for her step-father when, after her mother told her the story of his sad experience twenty years before, she related his distress of mind and suspicion when he read Jerrold's letter. It was then that Alice said, "And against that piece of evidence no man, I suppose, would hold me guiltless."

"You are wrong, dear," was her mother's answer. "It was powerless to move Captain Armitage. He scouted the idea of your guilt from the moment he set eyes on you, and never rested until he had overturned the last atom of evidence. Even I had to explain," said her mother, "simply to confirm his theory of the light Captain Chester had seen, and the shadows and the form at the window. It was just exactly as Armitage reasoned it out. I was wretched and wakeful, sleeping but fitfully, that night. I arose and took some bromide about three o'clock, and soon afterwards heard a fall, or a noise like one. I thought of you, and got up and went in your room, and all was quiet there, but it seemed close and warm: so I raised your shade, and then left both your door and mine open and went back to bed. I dozed away presently, and then woke feeling all startled again,—don't you know?—the sensation one experiences when aroused from sleep, certain that there has been a strange and startling noise, and yet unable to tell what it was? I lay still a moment, but the colonel slept through it all, and I wondered at it. I knew there had been a shot, or something, but could not bear to disturb him. At last I got up again and went to your room to be sure you were all right, and you were sleeping soundly still; but a breeze was beginning to blow and flap your shade to and fro, so I drew it and went out, taking my lamp with me this time and softly closing your door behind me. See how it all seemed to fit in with everything else that had happened. It took a man with a will of his own and an unshaken faith in woman to stand firm against such evidence."

And, though Alice Renwick was silent, she appreciated the fact none the less. Day after day she clung to her stalwart brother's side.

She had ceased to ask questions about Captain Armitage and that strange greeting after the first day or two, but, oddly enough, she could never let him talk long of any subject but that campaign, of his ride with the captain to the front, of the long talk they had had, and then the stirring fight and the magnificent way in which Armitage had handled his long skirmish-line. He was enthusiastic in his praise of the tall Saxon captain. He soon noted how silent and absorbed she sat when he was the theme of discourse; he incidentally mentioned little things "he" had said about "her" that morning, and marked how her color rose and her eyes flashed quick, joyful, questioning glance at his face, then fell in maiden shyness. He had speedily gauged the cause of that strange excitement displayed by Armitage at seeing him the morning he rode in with the scout. Now he was gauging, with infinite delight, the other side of the question. Then, brother-like, he began to twit and tease her; and that was the last of the confidences.

All the same it was an eager group that surrounded the colonel the evening he came down with the captain's letter. "It settles the thing in my mind. We'll go back to Sibley to-morrow; and as for you, Sergeant-Major Fred, your name has gone in for a commission, and I've no doubt a very deserving sergeant will be spoiled in making a very good-for-nothing second lieutenant. Get you back to your regiment, sir, and call on Captain Armitage as soon as you reach Fort Russell, and tell him you are much obliged. He has been blowing your trumpet for you there; and, as some of those cavalrymen have sense enough to appreciate the opinion of such a soldier as my ex-adjutant,—some of them, mind you: I don't admit that all cavalrymen have sense enough to keep them out of perpetual trouble,—you came in for a hearty endorsement, and you'll probably be up before the next board for examination. Go and bone your Constitution, and the Rule of Three, and who was the father of Zebedee's children, and the order of the Ptolemies and the Seleucidæ, and other such things that they'll be sure to ask you as indispensable to the mental outfit of an Indian-fighter." It was evident that the colonel was in joyous mood. But Alice was silent. She wanted to hear the letter. He would have handed it to Frederick, but both Mrs. Maynard and Aunt Grace clamored to hear it read aloud: so he cleared his throat and began:

"My dear Colonel,—

"Fred's chances for a commission are good, as the enclosed papers will show you; but even were this not the case I would have but one thing to say in answer to your letter: he should go back to his troop.

"Whatever our friends and fellow-citizens may think on the subject, I hold that the profession of the soldier is to the full as honorable as any in civil life; and it is liable at any moment to be more useful. I do not mean the officer alone. I say, and mean, the soldier. As for me, I would rather be first sergeant of my troop or company, or sergeant-major of my regiment, than any lieutenant in it except the adjutant. Hope of promotion is all that can make a subaltern's life endurable, but the staff-sergeant or the first sergeant, honored and

respected by his officers, decorated for bravery by Congress, and looked up to by his comrades, is a king among men. The pay has nothing to do with it. I say to Renwick, 'Come back as soon as your wound will let you,' and I envy him the welcome that will be his.

"As for me, I am even more eager to get back to you all; but things look very dubious. The doctors shake their heads at anything under a month, and say I'll be lucky if I eat my Thanksgiving dinner with you. If trying to get well is going to help, October shall not be done with before B Company will report me present again.

"I need not tell you, my dear old friend, how I rejoice with you in your—hum and haw and this is all about something else," goes on the colonel, in malignant disregard of the longing looks in the eyes of three women, all of whom are eager to hear the rest of it, and one of whom wouldn't say so for worlds. "Write to me often. Remember me warmly to the ladies of your household. I fear Miss Alice would despise this wild, open prairie-country; there is no golden-rod here, and I so often see her as—hum and hum and all that sort of talk of no interest to anybody," says he, with a quizzical look over his "bows" at the lovely face and form bending forward with forgetful eagerness to hear how "he so often sees her." And there is a great bunch of golden-rod in her lap now, and a vivid blush on her cheek. The colonel is waxing as frivolous as Fred, and quite as great a tease.

And then October comes, and Fred has gone, and the colonel and his household are back at Sibley, where the garrison is enraptured at seeing them, and where the women precipitate themselves upon them in tumultuous welcome. If Alice cannot quite make up her mind to return the kisses, and shrinks slightly from the rapturous embrace of some of the younger and more impulsive of the sisterhood,—if Mrs. Maynard is a trifle more distant and stately than was the case before they went away,—the garrison does not resent it. The ladies don't wonder they feel indignant at the way people behaved and talked; and each lady is sure that the behavior and the talk were all somebody else's; not by any possible chance could it be laid at the door of the speaker. And Alice is the reigning belle beyond dispute, though there is only subdued gayety at the fort, for the memory of their losses at the Spirit Wolf is still fresh in the minds of the regiment. But no man alludes to the events of the black August night, no woman is permitted to address either Mrs. Maynard or her daughter on the subject. There are some who seek to be confidential and who cautiously feel their way for an opening, but the mental sparring is vain: there is an indefinable something that tells the intruder, "Thus far, and no farther." Mrs. Maynard is courteous, cordial, and hospitable, Alice sweet and gracious and sympathetic, even, but confidential never.

And then Captain Armitage, late in the month, comes home on crutches, and his men give him a welcome that makes the rafters ring, and he rejoices in it and thanks them from his heart; but there is a welcome his eyes plead for that would mean to him far more than any other. How wistfully he studies her face! How unmistakable is the love and worship in every tone! How quickly the garrison sees it all, and how mad the garrison is to see whether or not 'tis welcome to her!

But Alice Renwick is no maiden to be lightly won. The very thought that the garrison had so easily given her over to Jerrold is enough to mantle her cheek with indignant protest. She accepts his attentions, as she does those of the younger officers, with consummate grace. She shows no preference, will grant no favors. She makes fair distribution of her dances at the hops at the fort and the parties in town. There are young civilians who begin to be devoted in society and to come out to the fort on every possible opportunity, and these, too, she welcomes with laughing grace and cordiality. She is a glowing, radiant, gorgeous beauty this cool autumn, and she rides and drives and dances, and, the women say, flirts, and looks handsomer every day, and poor Armitage is beginning to look very grave and depressed. "He wooes and wins not," is the cry. His wound has almost healed, so far as the thigh is concerned, and his crutches are discarded, but his heart is bleeding, and it tells on his general condition. The doctors say he ought to be getting well faster, and so they tell Miss Renwick,—at least somebody does; but still she relents not, and it is something beyond the garrison's power of conjecture to decide what the result will be. Into her pretty white-and-yellow room no one penetrates except at her invitation, even when the garrison ladies are spending the day at the colonel's; and even if they did there would be no visible sign by which they could judge whether his flowers were treasured or his picture honored above others. Into her brave and beautiful nature none can gaze and say with any confidence either "she loves" or "she loves not." Winter comes, with biting cold and blinding snow, and still there is no sign. The joyous holidays, the glad New Year, are almost at hand, and still there is no symptom of surrender. No one dreams of the depth and reverence and gratitude and loyalty and strength of the love that is burning in her heart until, all of a sudden, in the most unexpected and astonishing way, it bursts forth in sight of all.

They had been down skating on the slough, a number of the youngsters and the daughters of the garrison. Rollins was there, doing the devoted to Mamie Gray, and already there were gossips whispering that she would soon forget she ever knew such a beau as Jerrold in the new-found happiness of another one; Hall was there with the doctor's pretty daughter, and Mrs. Hoyt was matronizing the party, which would, of course, have been incomplete without Alice. She had been skating hand in hand with a devoted young subaltern in the artillery, and poor Armitage, whose leg was unequal to skating, had been ruefully admiring the scene. He had persuaded Sloat to go out and walk with him, and Sloat went; but the hollow mockery of the whole thing became apparent to him after they had been watching the skaters awhile, and he got chilled and wanted Armitage to push ahead. The captain said he believed his leg was too stiff for further tramping and would be the better for a rest; and Sloat left him.

Heavens! how beautiful she was, with her sparkling eyes and radiant color, glowing with the graceful exercise! He sat there on an old log, watching the skaters as they flew by him, and striving to keep up an impartial interest, or an appearance of it, for the other girls.

But the red sun was going down, and twilight was on them all of a sudden, and he could see nothing but that face and form. He closed his eyes a moment to shut out the too eager glare of the glowing disk taking its last fierce peep at them over the western bluffs, and as he closed them the same vision came back,—the picture that had haunted his every living, dreaming moment since the beautiful August Sunday in the woodland lane at Sablon. With undying love, with changeless passion, his life was given over to the fair, slender maiden he had seen in all the glory of the sunshine and the golden-rod, standing with uplifted head, with all her soul shining in her beautiful eyes and thrilling in her voice. Both worshipping and worshipped was Alice Renwick as she sang her hymn of praise in unison with the swelling chorus that floated through the trees from the little brown church upon the hill. From that day she was Queen Alice in every thought, and he her loyal, faithful knight for weal or woe.

Boom went the sunset gun far up on the parade above them. 'Twas dinner-time, and the skaters were compelled to give up their pastime. Armitage set his teeth at the entirely too devotional attitude of the artilleryman as he slowly and lingeringly removed her skates, and turned away in that utterly helpless frame of mind which will overtake the strongest men on similar occasions. He had been sitting too long in the cold, and was chilled through and stiff, and his wounded leg seemed numb. Leaning heavily on his stout stick, he began slowly and painfully the ascent to the railway, and chose for the purpose a winding path that was far less steep, though considerably longer, than the sharp climb the girls and their escorts made so light of. One after another the glowing faces of the fair skaters appeared above the embankment, and their gallants carefully convoyed them across the icy and slippery track to the wooden platform beyond. Armitage, toiling slowly up his pathway, heard their blithe laughter, and thought with no little bitterness that it was a case of "out of sight out of mind" with him, as with better men. What sense was there in his long devotion to her? Why stand between her and the far more natural choice of a lover nearer her years? "Like unto like" was Nature's law. It was flying in the face of Providence to expect to win the love of one so young and fair, when others so young and comely craved it. The sweat was beaded on his forehead as he neared the top and came in sight of the platform. Yes, they had no thought for him. Already Mrs. Hoyt was half-way up the wooden stairs, and the others were scattered more or less between that point and the platform at the station. Far down at the south end paced the fur-clad sentry. There it was an easy step from the track to the boards, and there, with much laughter but no difficulty, the young officers had lifted their fair charges to the walk. All were chatting gayly as they turned away to take the wooden causeway from the station to the stairs, and Miss Renwick was among the foremost at the point where it left the platform. Here, however, she glanced back and then about her, and then, bending down, began fumbling at the buttons of her boot.

"Oh, permit me, Miss Renwick," said her eager escort. "I will button it."

"Thanks, no. Please don't wait, good people. I'll be with you in an instant."

And so the other girls, absorbed in talk with their respective gallants, passed her by, and then Alice Renwick again stood erect and looked anxiously but quickly back.

"Captain Armitage is not in sight, and we ought not to leave him. He may not find it easy to climb to that platform," she said.

"Armitage? Oh, he'll come on all right," answered the battery-man, with easy assurance. "Maybe he has gone round by the road. Even if he hasn't, I've seen him make that in one jump many a time. He's an active old buffer for his years."

"But his wound may prove too much for that jump now. Ah! there he comes," she answered, with evident relief; and just at the moment, too, the forage-cap of the tall soldier rose slowly into view some distance up the track, and he came walking slowly down on the sharp curve towards the platform, the same sharp curve continuing on out of sight behind him,—behind the high and rocky bluff.

"He's taken the long way up," said the gunner. "Well, shall we go on?"

"Not yet," she said, with eyes that were glowing strangely and a voice that trembled. Her cheeks, too, were paling. "Mr. Stuart, I'm sure I heard the roar of a train echoed back from the other side."

"Nonsense, Miss Renwick! There's no train either way for two hours yet."

But she had begun to edge her way back toward the platform, and he could not but follow. Looking across the intervening space,—a rocky hollow twenty feet in depth,—he could see that the captain had reached the platform and was seeking for a good place to step up; then that he lifted his right foot and placed it on the planking and with his cane and the stiff and wounded left leg strove to push himself on. Had there been a hand to help him, all would have been easy enough; but there was none, and the plan would not work. Absorbed in his efforts, he could not see Stuart; he did not see that Miss Renwick had left her companions and was retracing her steps to get back to the platform. He heard a sudden dull roar from the rocks across the stream; then a sharp, shrill whistle just around the bluff. My God! a train, and that man there, alone, helpless, deserted! Stuart gave a shout of agony: "Back! Roll back over the bank!" Armitage glanced around; determined; gave one mighty effort; the iron-ferruled stick slipped on the icy track, and down he went, prone between the glistening rails, even as the black vomiting monster came thundering round the bend. He had struck his head upon the iron, and was stunned, not senseless, but scrambled to his hands and knees and strove to crawl away. Even as he did so he heard a shriek of anguish in his ears, and with one wild leap Alice Renwick came flying from the platform in the very face of advancing death, and the next instant, her arm clasped about his neck, his strong arms tightly clasping *her*, they were lying side by side, bruised, stunned, but safe, in a welcoming snow-drift half-way down the hither bank.

When Stuart reached the scene, as soon as the engine and some

wrecking-cars had thundered by, he looked down upon a picture that dispelled any lingering doubt in his mind. Armitage, clasping Queen Alice to his heart, was half rising from the blessed mantlet of the snow, and she, her head upon his broad shoulder, was smiling faintly up into his face: then the glorious eyes closed in a death-like swoon.

Fort Sibley had its share of sensations that eventful year. Its crowning triumph in the one that followed was the wedding in the early spring. Of all the lovely women there assembled, the bride by common consent stood unrivalled,—Queen Alice indeed. There was some difference of opinion among authorities as to who was really the finest-looking and most soldierly among the throng of officers in the conventional full-dress uniform: many there were who gave the palm to the tall, dark, slender lieutenant of cavalry who wore his shoulder-knots for the first time on this occasion, and who, for a man from the ranks, seemed consummately at home in the manifold and trying duties of a groomsman. Mrs. Maynard, leaning on his arm at a later hour and looking up rapturously in his bronzed features, had no divided opinion. While others had by no means so readily forgotten or forgiven the mad freak that so nearly involved them all in wretched misunderstanding, she had nothing but rejoicing in his whole career. Proud of the gallant officer who had won the daughter whom she loved so tenderly, she still believes, in the depths of the boundless mother-love, that no man can quite surpass her soldier son.

THE END.

MY FIRST APPEARANCE.

ONE bright October morning, between five and six years ago, I started in search of the stage door of the Grand Opera-House in New York. The necessity of earning my own daily bread had arisen. As my voice was the most available resource at my command, I determined to turn it at once into money.

I went alone, for two reasons. In the first place, if I failed in my attempt no one would be the wiser. If, on the other hand, my mission met with success, I felt a pride in standing upon my own merits and ability to perform the work I had chosen in preference to taking advantage of the glamour of social influence that might have been thrown around the *début* of one who stepped, as it were, directly from the drawing-room to the stage. My own knowledge of theatrical life had been gained entirely audience-side of the footlights; and of its requirements in detail I was absolutely ignorant.

A lucky chance had obtained for me a letter of introduction to the manager. Armed with this sesame to that delightfully mysterious place "behind the scenes," and filled with my orchestra-stall views, I presented myself at the stage entrance. The old man in charge of the door, having taken my letter and bidden me "wait here," disappeared into the gloom, whence he emerged a few minutes later with the message that I was to come and wait on the stage; they were rehearsing, and the manager could not see me until they had finished.

I followed him down the long dark passage with a mingled feeling of suppressed excitement, awe, and a strong desire to turn and run away. But before I could put the latter into action the old man had placed a chair for me in a remote corner of the stage and left me to my fate.

When my eyes became accustomed to the dim light, my first impressions were of the vastness of the stage, only half occupied by the people rehearsing, the chill gloom of its bare high brick walls, and the unattractiveness of the scenery and stage "seats" piled up against them. The only familiar thing in the whole scene was the musty, gassy odor which is sometimes wafted to the audience at the raising of the curtain.

The company were having a final rehearsal of the opera to be produced that evening. As I watched its progress from my distant seat, I got some insight into "stage business" and the management of a real rehearsal, a bewildering revelation to one of my merely amateur experience.

Occasionally some member of the chorus when off the scene glanced at me askance. Others came up and inquired for whom I was waiting. Their curiosity gratified, they returned to their work and left me unnoticed; but I was seized with such an overwhelming loneliness that even the novelty of my surroundings hardly overcame my sense of being a sort of forbidden guest among people whose lives and interests were entirely apart from mine.

DUNRAVEN RANCH.

BY

CHARLES KING,

U.S. ARMY,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," "THE DESERTER," ETC.

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DECEMBER, 1888.

DUNRAVEN RANCH.

I.

IT was nearly midnight, and still the gay party lingered on the veranda. There had been a fortnight of "getting settled" at the new post, preceded by a month of marching that had brought the battalion from distant service to this strange, Texan station. The newcomers had been hospitably welcomed by the officers of the little garrison of infantry, and now, in recognition of their many courtesies, the field-officer commanding the arriving troops had been entertaining the resident officers and ladies at dinner. The colonel was a host in himself, but preferred not to draw too heavily on his reserves of anecdote and small-talk, so he had called in two of his subalterns to assist in the pleasant duty of being attentive to the infantry ladies, and just now, at 11.45 P.M., he was wondering if Lieutenant Perry had not too literally construed his instructions, for that young gentleman was devoting himself to Mrs. Belknap in a manner so marked as to make the captain, her lawful lord and master, manifestly uneasy.

Mrs. Belknap, however, seemed to enjoy the situation immensely. She was a pretty woman at most times, as even her rivals admitted. She was a beautiful woman at all times, was the verdict of the officers of the regiment when they happened to speak of the matter among themselves. She was dark, with lustrous eyes and sweeping lashes, with coral lips and much luxuriance of tress, and a way of glancing sideways from under her heavily-fringed eyelids that the younger and more impressionable men found quite irresistible when accorded the rare luxury of a *tête-à-tête*. Belknap was a big and boisterous man; Mrs. Belknap was small in stature, and soft—very soft—of voice. Belknap was either brusquely repellent or oppressively cordial in manner; Mrs. Belknap was either gently and exasperatingly indifferent to those whom she did not care to attract, or caressingly sweet to those whose

attentions she desired. In their own regiment the young officers soon found that unless they wished to be involved in an unpleasantness with Belknap it was best to be only very moderately devoted to his pretty wife, and those to whom an unpleasantness with the big captain might have had no terrors of consequence were deterred by the fact that Mrs. Belknap's devotee among the "youngsters" had invariably become an object of coldness and aversion to the other dames and damsels of the garrison. Very short-lived, therefore, had been the little flirtations that sprang up from time to time in those frontier posts wherein Captain and Mrs. Belknap were among the chief ornaments of society; but now matters seemed to be taking other shape. From the very day that handsome Ned Perry dismounted in front of Belknap's quarters and with his soldierly salute reported to the then commanding officer that Colonel Brainard and his battalion of cavalry would arrive in the course of two or three hours, Mrs. Belknap had evinced a contentment in his society and assumed an air of quasi-proprietorship that served to annoy her garrison sisters more than a little. For the time being all the cavalrymen were bachelors, either by actual rank or "by brevet," as none of the ladies of the —th accompanied the battalion on its march, and none were expected until the stations of the regiment in its new department had been definitely settled. The post surgeon, too, was living a life of single blessedness as the early spring wore on, for his good wife had betaken herself, with the children, to the distant East as soon as the disappearance of the winter's snows rendered staging over the hard prairie roads a matter of no great danger or discomfort.

It was the doctor himself who, seated in an easy-chair at the end of the veranda, first called the colonel's attention to Perry's devotional attitude at Mrs. Belknap's side. She was reclining in a hammock, one little, slippered foot occasionally touching the floor and imparting a gentle, swinging motion to the affair, and making a soothing swish-swish of skirts along the matting underneath. Her jewelled hands looked very slender and fragile and white as they gleamed in the soft light that shone from the open windows of the parlor. They were busied in straightening out the kinks in the gold cord of his forage-cap and in rearranging a little silken braid and tassel that was fastened in clumsy, man-like fashion to one of the buttons at the side; he, seated in a camp-chair, was bending forward so that his handsome, shapely head was only a trifle higher than hers, and the two—hers so dark and rich in coloring, his so fair and massive and strong—came rather too close together for the equanimity of Captain Belknap, who had essayed to take a hand at whist in the parlor. One or two of the ladies, also, were silent observers of the scene,—silent as to the scene because, being in conversation at the time with brother officers of Lieutenant Perry, they were uncertain as yet how comments on his growing flirtation might be received. That their eyes should occasionally wander towards the hammock and then glance with sympathetic significance at those of some fair ally and intimate was natural enough. But when it became presently apparent that Mrs. Belknap was actually unfastening the little silken braid that had hung on Ned Perry's cap ever since

the day of his arrival,—all the while, too, looking shyly up in his eyes as her fingers worked; when it was seen that she presently detached it from the button and then, half hesitatingly, but evidently in compliance with his wishes, handed it to him; when he was seen to toss it carelessly—even contemptuously—away and then bend down lower, as though gazing into her shaded eyes,—Mrs. Lawrence could stand it no longer.

"Mr. Graham," said she, "isn't your friend Mr. Perry something of a flirt?"

"Who?—Ned?" asked Mr. Graham, in well-feigned amaze and with sudden glance towards the object of the inquiry. "How on earth should *I* know anything about it? Of course you do not seek expert testimony in asking me. He tries, I suppose, to adapt himself to circumstances. But why do you ask?"

"Because I see that he has been inducing Mrs. Belknap to take off that little tassel on the button of his cap. He has worn it when off duty ever since he came; and we supposed it was something he cherished; I know *she* did."

Graham broke forth in a peal of merry laughter, but gave no further reply, for just then the colonel and the doctor left their chairs, and, sauntering over to the hammock, brought mighty relief to Belknap at the whist-table and vexation of spirit to his pretty wife. The flirtation was broken up at a most interesting point, and Perry, rising suddenly, came over and joined Mrs. Lawrence.

If she expected to see him piqued or annoyed at the interruption and somewhat perturbed in manner, she was greatly mistaken. Nothing could have been more sunshiny and jovial than the greeting he gave her. A laughing apology to Graham for spoiling his *tête-à-tête* was accomplished in a moment, and then down by her side he sat and plunged into a merry description of his experiences at dinner, where he had been placed next to the chaplain's wife on the one hand, and she had been properly aggrieved at his attentions to Mrs. Belknap on the other.

"You must remember that Mrs. Wells is a very strict Presbyterian, Mr. Perry; and, for that matter, none of us have seen a dinner such as the colonel gave us this evening for ever and ever so long. We are quite unused to the ways of civilization; whereas you have just come from the East—and long leave. Perhaps it is the fashion to be all devotion to one's next-door neighbor at dinner."

"Not if she be as repellent and venerable as Mrs. Wells, I assure you. Why, I thought she would have been glad to leave the table when, after having refused sherry and Pontet-Canet for upwards of an hour, her glass was filled with champagne when she happened to be looking the other way."

"It is the first dinner of the kind she has ever seen here, Mr. Perry, and I don't suppose either Mr. or Mrs. Wells has been up so late before in years. He would have enjoyed staying and watching whist, but she carried him off almost as soon as we left the table. Our society has been very dull, you know,—only ourselves at the post all this last year, and nobody outside of it."

"One would suppose that with all this magnificent cattle-range there would be some congenial people ranching near you. Are there none at all?"

"Absolutely none! There are some ranches down in the Washita country, but only one fine one near us; and that might as well be on the other side of the Atlantic. No one from there ever comes here; and Dr. Quin is the only living soul in the garrison who ever got within the walls of that ranch. What he saw there he positively refuses to tell, despite all our entreaty."

"You don't tell me there's a ranch with a mystery here near Rossiter!" exclaimed Mr. Perry, with sudden interest.

"Why, I do, indeed! Is it possible you have been here two whole weeks and haven't heard of Dunraven Ranch?"

"I've heard there was such a thing; I saw it from a distance when out hunting the other day. But what's the mystery?—what's the matter with it?"

"That's what we all want to know,—and cannot find out. Now, *there* is an exploit worthy your energy and best efforts, Mr. Perry. There is a big, wealthy, well-stocked ranch, the finest homestead buildings, we are told, in all this part of Texas. They say it is beautifully furnished,—that it has a fine library, a grand piano, all manner of things indicative of culture and refinement among its occupants,—but the owner only comes around once or twice a year, and is an iceberg of an Englishman. All the people about the ranch are English, too, and the most repellent, boorish, discourteous lot of men you ever saw. When the Eleventh were here they did everything they could to be civil to them, but not an invitation would they accept, not one would they extend; and so from that day to this none of the officers have had any intercourse with the people at the ranch, and the soldiers know very little more. Once or twice a year some very ordinary looking men arrive who are said to be very distinguished people—in England; but they remain only a little while, and go away as suddenly as they came."

"And you have never seen any of them?"

"Never, except at a distance. Nor has any one of the officers, except Dr. Quin."

"And you have never heard anything about the inmates and why they keep up this policy of exclusiveness?"

"We have heard all manner of things,—some of them wildly romantic, some mysteriously tragic, and all of them, probably, absurd At all events, Captain Lawrence has told me he did not wish me to repeat what I had heard, or to be concerned in any way with the stories afloat: so you must ask somebody else. Try the doctor. To change the subject, Mr. Perry, I see you have lost that mysterious little silken braid and tassel you wore on your cap-button. I fancied there was some romance attached to it, and now it is gone."

Perry laughed, his blue eyes twinkling with fun: "If I will tell you how and where I got that tassel, will you tell me what you have heard about Dunraven Ranch?"

"I cannot, unless Captain Lawrence withdraws his prohibition.

Perhaps he will, though; for I think it was only because he was tired of hearing all our conjectures and theories."

"Well, will you tell me if I can induce the captain to say he has no objection?" persisted Perry.

"I will to-morrow,—if you will tell me about the tassel to-night."

"Is it a positive promise?—You will tell me to-morrow all you have heard about Dunraven Ranch if I will tell you to-night all I know about the tassel?"

"Yes,—a promise."

"Very well, then. You are a witness to the compact, Graham. Now for my confession. I have worn that tassel ever since our parting ball at Fort Riley. That is to say, it has been fastened to that button ever since the ball until to-night; but I've been mighty careful not to wear that cap on any kind of duty."

"And yet you let Mrs. Belknap take it off to-night?"

"Why shouldn't I? There was no sentiment whatever attached to it. I haven't the faintest idea whose it was, and only tied it there for the fun of the thing and to make Graham, here, ask questions."

"Mr. Perry!" gasped Mrs. Lawrence. "And do you mean that Mrs. Belknap knows?—that you told her what you have just told me?"

"Well, no," laughed Perry. "I fancy Mrs. Belknap thinks as you thought,—that it was a *gage d'amour*. Halloo! look at that light away out there across the prairie. What can *that* be?"

Mrs. Lawrence rose suddenly to her feet and gazed southeastward in the direction in which the young officer pointed. It was a lovely, starlit night. A soft wind was blowing gently from the south and bearing with it the fragrance of spring blossoms and far-away flowerets. Others, too, had arisen, attracted by Perry's sudden exclamation. Mrs. Belknap turned languidly in her hammock and glanced over her pretty white shoulder. The colonel followed her eyes with his and gave a start of surprise. The doctor turned slowly and composedly and looked silently towards the glistening object, and then upon the officers of the cavalry there fell sudden astonishment.

"What on earth could that have been?" asked the colonel. "It gleamed like the head-light of a locomotive, away down there in the valley of the Monee, then suddenly went out."

"Be silent a moment, and watch," whispered Mrs. Lawrence to Perry. "You will see it again; and—watch the doctor."

Surely enough, even as they were all looking about and commenting on the strange apparition, it suddenly glared forth a second time, shining full and lustrous as an unclouded planet, yet miles away beyond and above the fringe of cottonwoods that wound southeastward with the little stream. Full half a minute it shone, and then, abruptly as before, was hidden from sight.

Perry was about starting forward to join the colonel, when a little hand was laid upon his arm.

"Wait: once more you'll see it," she whispered. "Then take me in to Captain Lawrence. Do you see that the doctor is leaving?"

Without saying a word to any one, the post surgeon had very quietly withdrawn from the group on the veranda. He could not well leave by the front gate without attracting attention; but he strolled leisurely into the hall, took up a book that lay on the table, and passed through the group of officers seated smoking and chatting there, entered the sitting-room on the south side of the hall,—the side opposite the parlor where the whist-game was in progress,—and there he was lost to sight.

A third time the bright light burst upon the view of the gazers. A third time, sharply and suddenly it disappeared. Then for a moment all was silence and watchfulness; but it came no more.

Perry looked questioningly in his companion's face. She had turned a little white, and he felt sure that she was shivering.

"Are you cold?" he asked her, gently.

"No,—not that; but I hate mysteries, after what I've heard, and we haven't seen that light in ever so long. Come here to the corner one moment." And she led him around to the other flank of the big wooden, barrack-like residence of the commanding officer.

"Look up there," she said, pointing to a dark window under the peaked dormer roof of the large cottage to the south. "That is the doctor's house."

In a few seconds a faint gleam seemed to creep through the slats. Then the slats themselves were thrown wide open, a white shade was lowered, and, with the rays behind it growing brighter every instant, a broad white light shone forth over the roof of the veranda. Another moment, and footsteps were heard along the doctor's porch,—footsteps that presently approached them along the grass.

"Come," she said, plucking at his sleeve,—"come away: it is the doctor."

"For what reason?" he answered. "That would seem like hiding. No, Mrs. Lawrence, let us stay until he comes."

But the doctor passed them with brief and courteous salutation,—spoke of the beauty of the night and the balm of the summery air,—and went in again by the main door to the colonel's quarters.

Then Perry turned to his partner: "Well, Mrs. Lawrence, what does it all mean? Is this part of what you had to tell me?"

"Don't ask me now. I—I did not *want* to see what we have seen, but I had heard queer stories and could not believe them. Take me in to Captain Lawrence, please. And, Mr. Perry, you won't speak of this to any one, will you? Indeed, if I had known, I would not have come out here for the world; but I didn't believe it, even when she went away and took the children."

"*Who* went away?"

"Mrs. Quin,—the doctor's wife. And she was such a sweet woman, and so devoted to him."

"Well, pardon me, Mrs. Lawrence, I don't see through this thing at all. Do you mean that the doctor has anything to do with the mystery?"

She bowed her head as they turned back to the house: "I must not tell you any more to-night. You will be sure to hear something of it

all, here. Everybody on the piazza saw the lights, and all who were here before you came knew what they meant."

"What were they?"

"Signals, of some kind, from Dunraven Ranch."

II.

Ned Perry hated reveille and morning stables about as vehemently as was possible to a young fellow who was in other respects thoroughly in love with his profession. A fairer type of the American cavalry officer, when once he got in saddle and settled down to business, one would hardly ask to find. Tall, athletic, slender of build, with frank, laughing blue eyes, curly, close-cropped, light-brown hair, and a twirling moustache that was a source of inexpressible delight to its owner and of some envy to his brother subalterns, Mr. Perry was probably the best-looking of the young officers who marched with the battalion to this far-away station on the borders of the Llano Estacado. He had been ten years in service, counting the four he spent as a cadet, had just won his silver bar as the junior first-lieutenant of the regiment, was full to the brim of health, energy, animal spirits, and fun, and, barring a few duns and debts in his earlier experiences, had never known a heavier care in the world than the transient and ephemeral anxiety as to whether he would be called up for recitation on a subject he had not so much as looked at, or "hived" absent from a roll-call he had lazily slept through. Any other man, his comrades said, would have been spoiled a dozen times over by the petting he had received from both men and women; but there was something essentially sweet and genial about his nature,—something "lacking in guile about his perceptions," said a cynical old captain of the regiment,—and a jovial, sunshiny way of looking upon the world as an Eden, all men and all women as friends, and the Army as the profession above all others, and these various attributes combined to make him popular with his kind and unusually attractive to the opposite sex. As a cadet he had been perpetually on the verge of dismissal because of the appalling array of demerits he could roll up against his name; and yet the very officers who jotted down the memoranda of his sins—omission and commission—against the regulations were men who openly said he "had the making of one of the finest soldiers in the class." As junior second-lieutenant—"plebe"—of the regiment, he had been welcomed by every man from the colonel down, and it was considered particularly rough that he should have to go to such a company as Captain Canker's, because Canker was a man who never got along with any of his juniors; but there was something so irrepressibly frank and contrite in Perry's boyish face when he would appear at his captain's door in the early morning and burst out with, "By Jove, captain! I slept through reveille again this morning, and never got down till stables were nearly over," that even that cross-grained but honest troop-commander was disarmed, and, though he threatened and reprimanded, he would never punish,—would never deny his subaltern the faintest privilege; and when promotion took the captain to another regiment he bade

good-by to Perry with eyes that were suspiciously wet. "Why, blow it all, what do you fellows hate Canker so for?" the youngster often said. "He ought to put me in arrest time and again, but he won't. Blamed if I don't put myself in arrest, or confine myself to the limits of the post, or do something, to cut all this going to town and hops and such things. Then I can stick to the troop like wax and get up at reveille; but if I'm out dancing till two or three in the morning it's no use, I tell you: I just *can't* wake up." Indeed, it was part of the unwritten records of the —th that while at Riley and having very sociable times, Ned Perry actually declined invitations, cooped himself up in garrison, and wore metaphorical sackcloth and ashes, for a whole week, in penance for certain neglects of duty brought about by the presence of a bevy of pretty girls. It was not until Canker went to him in person and virtually ordered him out that Perry could be induced to appear at the party given in farewell to two of the prettiest, who were to leave for the East on the following day.

And yet he was a disappointment in a certain way. It was always predicted of Ned Perry that he would be "married and done for" within a year of his graduation. Every new face in the five years that followed revived the garrison prophecy, "Now he's gone, sure!" but, however devoted he might seem to the damsel in question, however restless and impatient he might be when compelled by his duties to absent himself from her side, however promising to casual observers—perchance to the damsel herself—might be all the surface-indications, the absolute frankness with which he proclaimed his admiration to every listener, and the fact that he "had been just so with half a dozen other girls," enabled the cooler heads of the regiment to decide that the time had not yet come,—or at least the woman.

"I do wish," said Mrs. Turner, "that Mr. Perry would settle on somebody, because, just so long as he doesn't, it is rather hard to tell whom he belongs to." And, as Mrs. Turner had long been a reigning belle among the married women of the —th, and one to whom the young officers were always expected to show much attention, her whimsical way of describing the situation was readily understood.

But here at the new station—at far-away Rossiter—matters were taking on a new look. To begin with, the wives of the officers of the cavalry battalion had not joined, none of the ladies of the —th were here, and none would be apt to come until the summer's scouting-work was over and done with. The ladies of the little battalion of infantry *were* here, and, though there were no maiden sisters or cousins yet at the post (rest assured that more than one was already summoned), they were sufficient in number to enliven the monotony of garrison life and sufficiently attractive to warrant all the attention they cared to receive. It was beginning to be garrison chat that if Ned Perry had not "settled on somebody" as the ultimate object of his entire devotion, somebody had settled on him, and that was pretty Mrs. Belknap.

And though Ned Perry hated reveille and morning stables, as has been said, and could rarely "take his week" without making one or more lapses, here he was this beautiful May morning out at daybreak when it was his junior's tour of duty, and wending his way with that

youngster out to the line of cavalry stables, booted and spurred and equipped for a ride.

The colonel had listened with some surprise to his request, proffered just as the party was breaking up the night before, to be absent from garrison a few hours the following morning.

"But we have battalion drill at nine o'clock, Mr. Perry, and I need you there," he said.

"Oh, I'll be back in time for that, sir. I wanted to be off three hours or so before breakfast."

The colonel could not help laughing. "Of course you can go,—go wherever you like at those hours, when you are not on guard; but I never imagined you would want to get up so early."

"Neither I would, colonel, but I've been interested in something I heard about this ranch down the Monee, and thought I'd like to ride down and look at it."

"Go ahead, by all means, and see whether those lights came from there. It made me think of a play I once saw,—the 'Colleen Bawn,'—where a fellow's sweetheart signalled across the lake by showing a light in her cottage window just that way, three times, and he answered by turning out the lights in his room. Of course the distance wasn't anything like this; and there was no one here to turn down any light—— Eh! what did you say?"

"I beg pardon, colonel. I didn't mean to interrupt," put in a gentle voice at his elbow, while a little hand on Perry's arm gave it a sudden and vigorous squeeze, "but Captain Lawrence has called me twice,—he will not re-enter after lighting his cigar,—and I must say good-night."

"Oh! good-night, Mrs. Lawrence. I'm sorry you go so early. We are going to reform you all in that respect as soon as we get fairly settled. Here's Perry, now, would sit up and play whist with me an hour yet."

"Not this night, colonel. He has promised to walk home with us" (another squeeze), "and go he must, or be a faithless escort. *Good*-night. We've had such a lovely, *lovely* time."

And Ned Perry, dazed, went with her to the gate, where Captain Lawrence was awaiting them. She had barely time to murmur,—

"You were just on the point of telling him about the doctor's lights. I cannot forgive myself for being the means of your seeing it; but keep my confidence, and keep—this, until everybody is talking about it: it will come soon enough."

Naturally, Mr. Perry went home somewhat perturbed in spirit and all alive with conjecture as to what these things could mean. The first notes of "assembly of the trumpeters"—generally known as "first call"—roused him from his sleep, and by the time the men marched out to stables he had had his plunge-bath, a vigorous rub, and a chance to think over his plans before following in their tracks, dressed for his ride. The astonishment of Lieutenant Parke, the junior of the troop, was something almost too deep for words when Perry came bounding to his side.

"What on earth brings *you* out, Ned?" was his only effort.

"Going for a gallop,—down the Monee: that's all. I haven't had a freshener for a week."

"Gad! we get exercise enough at morning drill, one would think, and our horses too. Oh!——" And Mr. Parke stopped suddenly. It flashed across him that perhaps Perry was going riding with a lady friend and the hour was *her* selection. If so, 'twas no business of his, and remarks were uncalled for. Accepting this as the one possible explanation of Perry's abnormal early rising, he curbed his tongue, and Perry, absorbed in his own projects and thinking of anything but what was passing through his comrade's brain, strode blithely over the springy turf, saying nothing further of his plan.

When he mounted and rode away from the stable Mr. Parke was outside at the picket-rope, and busily occupied in his duties, supervising the fastening of the fresh, spirited horses at the line, for the troop-commander was a man intolerant of disorder of any kind, and nothing more offended his eye than the sight of two or three of his chargers loose and plunging and kicking up and down the stable-yard. On the other hand, there was no one exploit that seemed to give the younger animals keener delight,—nothing that made the perpetrator a bigger hero in his own eyes or the object of greater envy among his fellows,—and as a consequence every device of which equine ingenuity was master was called into play, regularly as the morning came around, to break loose either from the controlling hand of the trooper or from the taut and straining picket-rope. The first care of the officer in charge and the troop-sergeants was, therefore, to see that all the horses were securely lashed and knotted. Not until he had examined every "halter-shank" was Mr. Parke at leisure to look around; but when he did, his comrade had disappeared from view.

The valley of the Monee, shallow, and bare of trees except in scattered clumps along the stream, stretched away southeastward for many a mile until lost to sight in the general level at the horizon. Off to the north and east the prairie rose and fell in long, low undulations, so devoid of abrupt slope of any kind as to seem absolutely flat to the unpractised eye. Southward and to the west of the lonely post the surface was relieved of this monotony by occasional gentle rise and swell. Nowhere, however, over the broad expanse was there sign of other vegetation than the gray-green carpet of buffalo-grass, and this carpet itself was mapped in fantastic pattern, the effect of prairie-fires more or less recent in occurrence. Where within a fortnight the flames had swept over the surface, all the bosom of the earth was one black barren, a land shunned for the time being by every living thing. Where by sudden freak of wind or fall of rain the scourging fires had been checked in their course, there lay broad wastes of virgin turf, already bleaching under the fierce Texan sun to the conventional gray of the buffalo-grass. But contrasted with these wide mantles of black and gray—contrasting sharply, too, because never blending—every mile or so were sudden patches of bright and lively green; and this was the hue of the sturdy young grass peeping up through the wastes that the flames had desolated late in March.

And over this broad level, horizon-bounded, not a moving object

could be seen. Far away, in little groups of three or four, black dots of grazing cattle marked the plain; and over in the "breaks" of the Monee, just beyond the fringing cottonwoods, two or three herds of Indian ponies were sleepily cropping their morning meal, watched by the little black imp of a boy whose dirty red blanket made the only patch of color against the southern landscape. Later in the day, when the sun mounted high in the heavens and the brisk westerly winds sent the clouds sailing swift across the skies, all the broad prairie seemed in motion, for then huge shadows swept its face with measured speed, and distant cattle and neighboring pony-herd appeared as though calmly and contentedly riding on a broad platform, Nature's own "observation-car," taking a leisurely journey towards the far-away Pacific.

But the sun was only just up as Mr. Parke came back from his inspection of the halter-fastenings and paused to look across the low valley. Far down to the southeast the rays seemed glinting on some bright objects clustered together within short range of the shadowy fringe, and the lieutenant shaded his eyes with his gauntlet and looked fixedly thitherward as he stood at the stable door.

"Some new tinning down at that English ranch they talk of, I suppose," was his explanation of the phenomenon, and then, "Wonder why Perry hasn't ridden to cultivate the acquaintance of those people before this. He was always the first man in the —th to find out who our neighbors were."

Pondering over this question, it occurred to Mr. Parke that Perry had said he was going down the Monee that morning; but nowhere was there a speck in sight that looked like loping horseman. To be sure, the trail bore close to the low bluffs that bounded the valley on the north by the time one had ridden a mile or so out from the post. He was probably hidden by this shoulder of the prairie, and would continue to be until he reached the bend, five miles below. No use watching for him then. Besides, he might not yet have started. Mr. Parke recalled the fact that he half suspected a while ago that Ned was going to ride—an early ante-breakfast ride—with a lady friend. Mrs. Belknap had her own horse, and was an accomplished *équestrienne;* Mrs. Lawrence rode fairly well, and was always glad to go, when somebody could give her a saddle and a reliable mount. There were others, too, among the ladies of the infantry garrison who were no novices *à cheval.* Mr. Parke had no intention whatever of prying into the matter. It was simply as something the officer in charge of stable-duty was entitled to know that he turned suddenly and called,—

"Sergeant Gwynne!"

He heard the name passed down the dark interior of the stable by the men sweeping out the stalls, and the prompt and cheery reply. The next instant a tall young trooper stepped forth into the blaze of early sunlight, his right hand raised in salute, and stood erect and motionless by the lieutenant's side.

"Did Mr. Perry take an extra horse, sergeant?"

"No, sir."

"I thought possibly he meant to take Roland. He's the best lady's-horse in the troop, is he not?"

"Yes, sir; but Roland is at the line now."

"Very well, then. That's all. I presume he has just ridden down to Dunraven." And Mr. Parke turned to look once more at the glinting objects down the distant valley. It was a moment or two before he was aware of the fact that the sergeant still stood there, instead of returning to his duties.

"I said that was all, sergeant: you can go back to your feeding." And then Mr. Parke turned in some surprise, for Sergeant Gwynne, by long odds the "smartest" and most soldierly of the non-commissioned officers of the cavalry battalion, for the first time in his history seemed to have forgotten himself. Though his attitude had not changed, his face had, and a strange look was in his bright blue eyes,—a look of incredulity and wonderment and trouble all combined. The lieutenant was fairly startled when, as though suddenly gathering himself together, the sergeant falteringly asked,—

"I beg pardon, sir, but—he had ridden—*where?*"

"Down to the ranch, sergeant,—that one you can just see, away down the valley."

"I know, sir; but—the name?"

"Dunraven Ranch."

For an instant the sergeant stood as though dazed, then, with sudden effort, saluted, faced about, and plunged into the dark recesses of the stable.

III.

Meantime, Lieutenant Perry was riding blithely down the winding trail, totally unconscious that his movements were of the faintest consequence to anybody but himself, and equally heedless of their being a source of speculation. His horse was one he rejoiced in, full of spirit and spring and intelligence; the morning was beautiful,—just cool enough to be exhilarating; his favorite hound, Bruce, went bounding over the turf under the slopes, or ranging off through the cottonwoods along the stream, or the shallow, sandy *arroyos*, where the grass and weeds grew rank and luxuriant. Every now and then with sudden rush and whir a drove of prairie-chickens would leap from their covert, and, after vigorous flapping of wings for a few rods, would go skimming restfully in long easy curve, and settle to earth again a hundred yards away, as though suddenly reminded of the fact that this was mating-time and no gentleman would be mean enough to shoot at such a season. Every little while, too, with prodigious kicking of dust and show of heels, with eyes fairly bulging out of his feather-brained head, and tall lop-ears laid flat on his back, a big jack-rabbit would bound off into space, and go tearing across the prairie in mad race for his threatened life, putting a mile between him and the Monee before he began to realize that the two quadrupeds ambling along the distant trail were obedient to the will of that single rider, who had no thought to spare for game so small. Some Indian ponies, grazing across his pathway, set back their stunted ears, and, cow-like, refused to budge at sight and hearing of the big American horse; whereat a little vagabond of a Cheyenne, not ten years old nor four feet high, set up a shrill

chatter and screech and let drive a few well-directed clods of turf, and then showed his white teeth in a grin as Perry sung out a cheery "*How!* sonny," and spurred on through the opening thoroughfare, heedless of spiteful pony looks or threatening heels.

Perry's spirits rose with every rod. Youth, health, contentment, all were his, and his heart was warm towards his fellow-men. To the best of his reckoning, he had not an enemy or detractor in the world. He was all gladness of nature, all friendliness, frankness, and cordiality. The toughest cow-boy whom they had met on the long march down, the most crabbed of the frontiersmen they had ever encountered, was never proof against such sunshine as seemed to irradiate his face. He would go out of his way at any time to meet and hail a fellow-man upon the prairies, and rarely came back without knowing all about him,—where he was from, whither he was bound, and what were his hopes and prospects. And as for himself, no man was readier to answer question or to meet in friendliest and most jovial spirit the rough but well-meant greetings of "the Plains."

Being in this frame of mind to an extent even greater than his normal wont, Mr. Perry's eyes glistened, and he struck spur to hasten Nolan's stride, when, far ahead, and coming towards him on the trail, he saw a horseman like himself. Being in this mood of sociability, he was something more than surprised to see that all of a sudden that horseman had reined in—a mere black dot a mile away—and was presumably examining him as he advanced. Hostile Indians there had been none for many a long month, "road-agents" would have starved in a region where there practically were no roads, cow-boys might—and did—get on frolics and have wild "tears" at times, but who ever heard of their being hostile, man to man? Yet Perry was plainsman enough to tell, even at the mile of distance, that the stranger had halted solely to scrutinize *him*, and, next, to his vast astonishment, that something in his appearance had proved either alarming or suspicious, for the horseman had turned abruptly, plunged through the timber and across the stream, and in another moment, veering that way himself to see, Perry marked him fairly racing into the mouth of a shallow ravine, or "break," that entered the valley from the south, and there he was lost to sight.

"What an ill-mannered galoot!" was his muttered comment, as he gave Nolan brief chance to crop the juicy grass, while his perturbed rider sat gazing across the stream in the direction taken by the shy horseman. "I've half a mind to drop the ranch and put out after that fellow. That ravine can't go in so very far but what he must soon show up on the level prairie; and I'll bet Nolan could run him down." After a moment's reflection, however, Mr. Perry concluded that, as he had come so far and was now nearly within rifle-shot of the mysterious goal of his morning ride, he might as well let the stranger go, and pushed ahead, himself, for Dunraven.

The stream bent southward just at the point where he had first caught sight of the horseman, and around that point he knew the ranch to be. Very probably that was one of the ranchmen of whom Mrs. Lawrence had spoken,—churlish fellows, with a civil word for

nobody, grim and repellent. Why, certainly! That accounted for his evident desire to avoid the cavalryman; but he need not have been in such desperate haste,—need not have kept at such unapproachable bounds, as though he shunned even being seen. That was the queer thing, thought Perry. He acted just as though he did not want to be recognized. Perhaps he'd been up to some devilment at the ranch.

This thought gave spur to his speed, and Nolan, responsive to his master's mood, leaped forward along the winding trail once more. The point was soon reached and turned, and the first object that caught Perry's eye was a long row of stakes stretching from the cottonwoods straight to the south up the gentle slope to the prairie, and indicating beyond all question the presence there of a stout and high and impassable wire fence. There are few things the cavalryman holds in meaner estimate.

"That marks the western limit," thought Perry to himself, "and doubtless reaches miles away to the south, from what I hear. Now, where does one enter?"

A little farther on he came upon a trail leading from the low bluffs to his left hand. It crossed the winding bridle-path on which he rode, though some of the hoof-tracks seemed to join, and wheel-tracks too. He had marked that between the fort and the point no sign of wheel appeared: it was a hoof-trail and nothing more. Now a light and little-travelled wagon-track came in from the north, and while one branch seemed to cross the Monee and to ascend the opposite slopes close along the wire fence, the other joined him and went on down the stream. This he decided to follow.

A ride of a few hundred yards brought him to a point where a shoulder of bluff twisted the trail well in towards the stream, and he, thinking to cross and reconnoitre on the other shore, turned Nolan in that way, and was suddenly brought up standing by the heaviest and most forbidding wire fence he had ever seen. Yes, there it stretched away through the cottonwoods, straight as a die, back to the angle whence started the southward course he first had noted, and, looking down stream, far as the eye could reach, he marked it, staked as though by the theodolite itself, straight as surveyor could make it, a rigid line to the southeast. Sometimes the stream lay on one side, sometimes on the other; so, too, the cottonwoods; but there, grim and bristling and impassable, over five feet high, and fairly snarling with its sharp and jagged teeth, this inhuman barrier lay betwixt him and the lands of Dunraven Ranch.

"Well," thought Perry, "I've often heard an Englishman's house was his castle, but who would have thought of staking and wiring in half a county—half a Texas county—in this hoggish way? How far down is the entrance, anyhow?"

Following the trail, he rode down-stream a full half-mile, and still there seemed no break. Nowhere on the other shore was there sign of bridle-path leading up the slopes. Turning to his left in some impatience, he sent Nolan at rapid lope across the intervening "bottom," and soon reached the bluffs, which rose perhaps forty or fifty feet above the stream. Once on the crest, the prairie stretched before him, north-

ward, level as a floor, until it met the sky; but it was southward he longed to look, and thither quickly turned. Yes, there it lay,—Dunraven Ranch, in all its lonely majesty. From where he gazed the nearest building stood a good long mile away. That it was the homestead he divined at once, for a broad veranda ran around the lower story, and white curtains were visible at the dormer-windows of the upper floor. Back of it and on the eastern flank were other buildings, massive-looking, single-storied affairs,—evidently stables, storehouses, and corrals. There was a tall windmill there,—an odd sight in so remote a region,—and a big water-tank. Perry wondered how it ever got there. Then at the southwest angle was a building that looked like an office of some kind. He could see horses tethered there, and what seemed to be human figures moving about. Beyond it all, to the east and south, were herds of grazing cattle, and here and there in the dim distance a horseman moved over the prairie. This reminded him of the stranger who had given him the slip; and he gazed westward in search of him.

Far up the valley, between him and the distant post, he could plainly see a black object just descending the slopes from the southern prairie to the stream. Not another was in sight that his practised eye did not know to be cattle. That, then, was his horseman, once more going fort-wards in the valley, after having made a three- or four-mile *détour* to avoid him. "Now, what sort of a Christian is that fellow?" thought Perry, as he gazed at the distant speck. "Going to the fort, too. By thunder! I'll find out who *he* is, anyhow. *Now* I'm going to the ranch."

Down the slopes he rode. Down the winding trail once more he trotted, peering through every gap among the cottonwoods, slaking Nolan's thirst at a little pool in the stream, and then, after another long half-mile, he came to a sudden turn to the right. The road dipped and twisted through the stream-bed, rose to the other side, wound through the cottonwoods and then out on the open turf. Huzza! There it stretched up the slopes straight away for the south, straight through a broad gap between two heavy gate-posts standing on the stake-line of that rigid fence. Nolan broke into a brisk canter and gave a neigh of salutation; Perry's eyes glistened with anticipation as he bent over his charger's neck, keenly searching the odd-looking structure growing on his vision as they neared the fence. Then, little by little, Nolan's eager stride shortened and grew choppy. Another moment, and horse and rider reined up short in disappointment. Between the gate-posts swung a barrier of cobweb lightness, slender and airy as ever spider wove, but bristling with barbs, stiff as "bullfinch" and unyielding as steel. One glance showed Perry that this inhospitable gate was firmly locked.

For a moment he sat in saddle, studying the situation, while Nolan poked his head over the topmost strand of wire and, keeping at respectful distance from the glittering barbs, gazed wistfully over the enclosed prairie in search of comrade quadruped who could tell him what manner of place this was. Meantime, his rider was intently eying the heavy padlock that was secured on the inner side of the gate. It was square in shape, massive and bulky,—something utterly unlike any-

thing he had ever seen among the quartermaster's stores. Dismounting, and holding Nolan well back from the aggressive fence with one hand, he gingerly passed the other through the spike-fringed aperture and turned the padlock so as to get a better view. It was of English make, as he surmised, and of strength sufficient to resist anything short of a trip-hammer. Evidently no admission was to be gained here, he reasoned; and yet it was through here that that horseman had come but an hour before. Here were the fresh hoof-prints in the trail, and it was evident that the rider had dismounted, opened the gate, led his horse through, closed and fastened it, then remounted and ridden away. Perry was plainsman enough to read this from the hoof-prints. Studying them carefully, a look of surprise came into his face: he bent down and closely examined the two or three that were most clearly defined upon the trail, then gave a long whistle as a means of expressing his feelings and giving play to his astonishment:

"Johnny Bull holds himself too high and mighty to have anything to do with us blarsted Yankees, it seems, except when he wants his horses shod. These shoes were set at the post blacksmith-shop, or I'm a duffer," was the lieutenant's verbal comment. "Now, how was it done without the quartermaster's knowing it? That's the cavalry shoe!"

Pondering over this unlooked-for revelation, Mr. Perry once more mounted, and turned his disappointed steed again down-stream. He had determined to follow the fence in search of another opening. A mile he rode among the cottonwoods and across low grassy points, and still that inflexible barrier stretched grimly between him and the open prairie to the south. Once, up a long shallow "break," he caught sight of the roofs of some of the ranch-buildings full a thousand yards away, and realized that he had passed to the east of them and was farther from the goal of his ambition than when he stood at that bristling gate. At last, full half a mile farther on, he saw that a wire fence ran southward again across the prairie, as though marking the eastern boundary of the homestead-enclosure, and, conjecturing that there was probably a trail along that fence and an opening through, even if the southeastward line should be found fenced still farther, he sent Nolan through the Monee to the open bank on the northern side, cantered along until the trail turned abruptly southward, and, following it, found himself once more at the fence just where the heavy corner-post stood deeply embedded in the soil. Sure enough, here ran another fence straight up the gentle slope to the south, a trail along its eastern side, and a broad cattle-gap, dusty and tramped with the hoofs of a thousand steers, was left in the fence that, prolonged down-stream, spanned the northern boundary. Inside the homestead-lot all was virgin turf.

Following the southward trail, Perry rode briskly up the long incline. It was east of this fence he had seen the cattle-herds and their mounted watchers. He was far beyond the ranch-buildings, but felt sure that, once well up on the prairie, he could have an uninterrupted view of them and doubtless meet some of the ranch people and satisfy himself what there was in the stories of their churlish and

repellent demeanor. The sun was climbing higher all this time, and he, eager in pursuit of his reconnoissance, gave little heed to fleeting minutes. If fair means could accomplish it, he and Nolan were bound to have acquaintance with Dunraven Ranch.

Ten minutes' easy lope brought him well up on the prairie. There —westward now—was the mysterious clump of brown buildings, just as far away as when he stood, baffled and disappointed, by the gate-way on the Monee. Here, leading away towards the distant buildings, was a bridle-path. Here in the fence was a gap just such as he had encountered on the stream, and that gap was barred and guarded by the counterpart of the first gate and firmly secured by a padlock that was the other's twin. Mr. Perry's comment at this point of his explorations was brief and characteristic, if not objectionable. He gave vent to the same low whistle, half surprise, half vexation, that had comforted his soul before, but supplemented the whistle with the unnecessary remark, "Well, I'll be damned!"

Even Nolan entered his protest against such incredible exclusiveness. Thrusting his lean head far over the topmost wire as before, he signalled long and shrill,—a neigh that would have caught the ear of any horse within a mile,—and then, all alert, he waited for an answer. It came floating on the rising wind, a responsive call, a signal as eager and confident as his own, and Nolan and Nolan's rider whirled quickly around to see the source from whence it rose. Four hundred yards away, just appearing over a little knoll in the prairie, and moving towards them from the direction of a distant clump of grazing cattle, another horse and rider came trotting into hailing-distance; and Perry, his bright blue eyes dilating, and Nolan, his dainty, sensitive ears pricked forward, turned promptly to meet and greet the new arrivals.

For fifty yards or so the stranger rode confidently and at rapid trot. Perry smilingly watched the out-turned toes, the bobbing, "bent-over" seat, and angular elbows that seemed so strange and out of place on the broad Texan plain. He could almost see the "crop" in the free hand, and was smiling to himself at the idea of a "crop" to open wire gates, when he became aware of the fact that the stranger's mien had changed; confidence was giving place to hesitancy, and he was evidently checking the rapid trot of his horse and throwing his weight back on the cantle, while his feet, thrust through to the very heels in the gleaming steel stirrups, were braced in front of the powerful shoulders of the bay. The horse wanted to come, the rider plainly wanted to stop. Another moment, and Perry could see that the stranger wore eyeglasses and had just succeeded in bridging them on his nose and was glaring at him with his chin high in air. They were within two hundred yards of each other by this time, and, to Perry's astonishment, the next thing the stranger did was to touch sharply his horse with barbed heel, whirl him spitefully about, and go bobbing off across the prairie at lively canter, standing up in his stirrups, and bestriding his steed as though his object were not so much a ride as a game of leap-frog.

It was evident that he had caught sight of Perry when Nolan neighed, had ridden at once to meet him, expecting to find some one connected with the ranch, and had veered off in disgust the moment he

was able to recognize the uniform and horse-equipments of the United States Cavalry.

IV.

Sweet-tempered a fellow as Mr. Perry confessedly was, there was something in the stranger's conduct that galled him inexpressibly. The tenets of "society," the formalities of metropolitan life, have no recognition whatsoever on the wide frontier when once the confines of the garrison are passed. Out on the broad expanse of the Plains the man who shuns the greeting of his fellow is set down at once as a party whose antecedents are shadowy and whose character is suspicious; and never before in his experience of several years and his wanderings from the Yellowstone to the Washita had Ned Perry met a frontiersman who fled at sight of him, except one horse-thief. From his handsome mount, his garb, and his general appearance, Perry set this stranger down as one of the Englishmen residing at the ranch. It was not fear of arrest and capture that sent *him* scowling away across the prairie; it was deliberate intent to avoid, and this was, to Perry's thinking, tantamount to insult. One moment he gazed after the retreating form of the horseman, then clapped his forage-cap firmly down upon his head, shook free the rein, and gave Nolan the longed-for word. Another instant, and with set teeth and blazing, angry eyes he was thundering at headlong speed, swooping down upon the unconscious stranger in pursuit. Before that sunburned, curly-haired, bulkily-framed young man had the faintest idea of what was impending, Mr. Perry was reining in his snorting steed alongside and cuttingly accosting him:

"I beg your pardon, my good sir, but may I ask what you mean by trotting away when it must have been evident that I wanted to speak with you?"

The stranger turned slightly and coolly eyed the flushed and indignant cavalryman. They were trotting side by side now, Nolan plunging excitedly, but the English horse maintaining his even stride; and stronger contrast of type and style one could scarcely hope to find. In rough tweed shooting-jacket and cap, brown Bedford cords fitting snugly at the knee but flapping like shapeless bags from there aloft to the waist, in heavy leather gaiters and equally heavy leather gloves, the stocky figure of the Englishman had nothing of grace or elegance, but was sturdy, strong, and full of that burly self-reliance which is so characteristic of the race. Above his broad, stooping shoulders were a bull neck, reddened by the sun, a crop of close-curling, light-brown hair, a tanned and honest face lighted up by fearless gray eyes and shaded by a thick and curling beard of lighter hue than the hair of his massive head. He rode with the careless ease and supreme confidence of the skilled horseman, but with that angularity of foot and elbow, that roundness of back and bunching of shoulders, that incessant rise and fall with every beat of his horse's powerful haunch, that the effect was that of neither security nor repose. His saddle, too, was the long, flat-seated, Australian model, pig-skin, with huge rounded leathern cushions circling in front and over the knees, adding to the cumbrous-

ness of his equipment and in no wise to the comfort; but his bit and curb-chain were of burnished steel, gleaming as though fresh from the hands of some incomparable English groom, and the russet reins were soft and pliable, telling of excellent stable management and discipline. Perry couldn't help admiring that bridle, even in his temporary fit of indignation.

As for him,—tall, slender, elegantly made, clothed in the accurately-fitting undress "blouse" of the army and in riding-breeches that displayed to best advantage the superb moulding of his powerful thighs, sitting like centaur well down in the saddle, his feet and lower legs, cased in natty riding-boots, swinging close in behind the gleaming shoulders of his steed, erect as on parade, yet swaying with every motion of his horse, graceful, gallant, and to the full as powerful as his burly companion, the advantage in appearance was all on Perry's side, and was heightened by Nolan's spirited action and martial trappings. Perry was an exquisite in his soldier taste, and never, except on actual campaign, rode his troop-horse without his broidered saddle-cloth and gleaming bosses. All this, and more, the Englishman seemed quietly noting as, finally, without the faintest trace of irritability, with even a suspicion of humor twinkling about the corners of his mouth, he replied,—

"A fellow may do as he likes when he's on his own bailiwick, I suppose."

"All the same, wherever I've been, from here to Assiniboia, men meet like Christians, unless they happen to be road-agents or cattle-thieves. What's more, I am an officer of a regiment just arrived here, and, from the Missouri down, there isn't a ranch along our trail where we were not welcome and whose occupants were not 'hail-fellow-well-met' in our camps. You are the first people to shun us; and, as that fort yonder was built for your protection in days when it was badly needed, I want to know what there is about its garrison that is so obnoxious to Dunraven Ranch,—that's what you call it, I believe?"

"That's what—it is called."

"Well, here! I've no intention of intruding where we're not wanted. I simply didn't suppose that on the broad prairies of the West there was such a place as a ranch where one of my cloth was unwelcome. I am Mr. Perry, of the —th Cavalry, and I'm bound to say I'd like to know what you people have against us. Are you the proprietor?"

"I'm not. I'm only an employee."

"Who *is* the owner?"

"He's not here now."

"Who *is* here who can explain the situation?"

"Oh, as to that, I fancy I can do it as well as anybody. It is simply because we have to do pretty much as you fellows,—obey orders. The owner's orders are not aimed at you any more than anybody else. He simply wants to be let alone. He bought this tract and settled here because he wanted a place where he could have things his own way,—see people whom he sent for and nobody else. Every man in his employ is expected to stick to the ranch so long as he is on the pay-roll, and to carry out his instructions. If he can't, he may go."

"And your instructions are to prevent people getting into the ranch?"

"Oh, hardly that, you know. We don't interfere. There's never any one to come, as a rule, and, when they do, the fence seems to be sufficient."

"Amply, I should say; and yet were I to tell you that I had business with the proprietor and needed to ride up to the ranch, you would open the gate yonder, I suppose?"

"No: I would tell you that the owner was away, and that in his absence I transacted all business for him."

"Well, thank you for the information given me, at all events. May I ask the name of your misanthropical boss? You might tell him I called."

"Several officers called three years ago, but he begged to be excused."

"And what is the name?"

"Mr. Maitland—is what he is called."

"All right. Possibly the time may come when Mr. Maitland will be as anxious to have the cavalry around him as he is now to keep it away. But if *you* ever feel like coming up to the fort, just ride in and ask for me."

"I feel like it a dozen times a week, you know; but a man mustn't quarrel with his bread-and-butter. I met one of your fellows once on a hunt after strayed mules, and he asked me in, but I couldn't go. Sorry, you know, and all that, but the owner won't have it."

"Well, then there's nothing to do for it but say good-day to you. I'm going back. Possibly I'll see some of your people up at Rossiter when they come to get a horse shod."

"A horse shod! Why, man alive, we shoe all our horses here!"

"Well, that fellow who rode out of your north gate and went up towards the fort about an hour or so ago had his horse shod at a cavalry forge, or I'm a duffer."

A quick change came over the Englishman's face: a flush of surprise and anger shot up to his forehead: he wheeled about and gazed eagerly, loweringly, back towards the far-away buildings.

"How do you know there was—— What fellow did you see?" he sharply asked.

"Oh, I don't know who he was," answered Perry, coolly. "He avoided me just as pointedly as you did,—galloped across the Monee and out on the prairie to dodge me; but he came out of that gate on the stream, locked it after him, and went on up to the fort; and his horse had cavalry shoes. Good-day to you, my Britannic friend. Come and see us when you get tired of prison-life." And, with a grin, Mr. Perry turned and rode rapidly away, leaving the other horseman in a brown study.

Once fairly across the Monee, he ambled placidly along, thinking of the odd situation of affairs at this great prairie-reservation, and almost regretting that he had paid the ranch the honor of a call. Reaching the point where the wagon-tracks crossed the stream to the gate-way in the boundary fence, he reined in Nolan and looked through a vista in

the cottonwoods. There was the Englishman, dismounted, stooping over the ground, and evidently examining the hoof-prints at the gate. Perry chuckled at the sight, then, whistling for Bruce, who had strayed off through the timber, he resumed his jaunty way to the post.

In the events of the morning there were several things to give him abundant cause for thought, if not for lively curiosity, but he had not yet reached the sum total of surprises in store for him. He was still two miles out from the fort, and riding slowly along the bottom, when he became aware of a trooper coming towards him on the trail. The sunbeams were glinting on the polished ornaments of his forage-cap and on the bright yellow chevrons of his snugly-fitting blouse. Tall and slender and erect was the coming horseman, a model of soldierly grace and carriage, and as he drew nearer and his hand went up to the cap-visor in salute a gesture from his young superior brought an instant pressure on the rein, and horse and man became an animated statue. It was a wonderfully sudden yet easy check of a steed in rapid motion, and Mr. Perry, a capital rider himself, could not withhold his admiration.

"Where did you learn that sudden halt, sergeant?" he asked. "I never saw anything so quick except the Mexican training; but that strains a horse and throws him on his haunches."

"It is not uncommon abroad, sir," was the quiet answer. "I saw it first in the English cavalry; and it is easy to teach the horse."

"I must get you to show me the knack some day. I've noticed it two or three times, and would like to learn it. What I stopped you for was this: you've been stable-sergeant ever since we got here, have you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then if anybody besides members of the troop had horses shod at our forge you would be pretty apt to know it?"

"I know that no one has, sir." And a flush was rising to the young sergeant's face and a pained look hovering about his bright blue eyes. Yet his manner was self-restrained and full of respect.

"Don't think I'm intimating anything to the contrary, Sergeant Gwynne. No soldier in the regiment more entirely holds the confidence of his captain—of all the officers—than you. I was not thinking of that. But somebody down there at that big ranch below us has had his horse shod by a cavalry farrier,—it may have been done while the Eleventh were here,—and, while I knew you would not allow it at our forge, I thought it possible that it might be done in your absence."

"It's the first time I've been out of sight of the stables since we came to the post, sir, and the captain gave me permission to ride down the valley this morning. May I ask the lieutenant why he thinks some ranchman is getting his shoeing done here at the post?"

"I've been down there this morning, and met a man coming up. He avoided me, and rode over to the south side, and so excited my curiosity; and as they keep that whole place enclosed in a wire fence, and he had evidently come out of the north gate, I was struck by the sight of the hoof-prints: they were perfectly fresh there on the trail, and plain as day. There's no mistaking the shoe, you know. By the

way, he rode up to the fort, and probably entered at your side of the garrison: did you see him?"

"No, sir, and, except for breakfast,—just after reveille,—I have been at stables all the morning. I was there when the lieutenant got his horse."

"Yes, I remember. Then no one rode in from the valley?"

"No civilian,—no ranchman, sir. The only horsemen I've seen were some Cheyenne scouts during the last two hours, and Dr. Quin, —just before sick-call."

"Dr. Quin!—the post surgeon! Are you sure, sergeant?"

"Certainly, sir. The doctor rode into the post just about an hour after the lieutenant left,—coming up the valley too. He went right around to his own stable, over towards the hospital."

A look of amaze and stupefaction was settling on Perry's face. Now for the first time he recalled Mrs. Lawrence's intimations with regard to the doctor, and his connection with the signal-lights. Now for the first time it occurred to him that the secret of those cavalry hoof-prints at the gate was that no ranchman, but an officer of the garrison had been the means of leaving them there. Now for the first time it flashed upon him that the Englishman's astonishment and concern on hearing of those hoof-tracks indicated that the story of a mystery at Dunraven in which the doctor was connected amounted to something more than garrison rumor. Now for the first time an explanation occurred to him of the singular conduct of the horseman who had dodged him by crossing the Monee. Never in his young life had he known the hour when he was ashamed or afraid to look any man in the eye. It stung him to think that here at Rossiter, wearing the uniform of an honorable profession, enjoying the trust and confidence of all his fellows, was a man who had some secret enterprise of which he dared not speak and of whose discovery he stood in dread. There could be little doubt that the elusive stranger was Dr. Quin, and that there was grave reason for the rumors of which Mrs. Lawrence had vaguely told him.

For a moment he sat, dazed and irresolute, Nolan impatiently pawing the turf the while; then, far across the prairie and down the valley there came floating, quick and spirited, though faint with distance, the notes of the cavalry trumpet sounding "right, front into line." He looked up, startled.

"They're out at battalion drill, sir," said the sergeant. "They marched out just as I left stables."

"Just my infernal luck again!" gasped Perry, as he struck spur to Nolan and sent him tearing up the slope: "I might have known I'd miss it!"

V.

That evening a group of cavalry officers came sauntering back from stables, and as they reached the walk in front of officers' row a dark-featured, black-bearded, soldierly-looking captain separated himself from the rest and entered the colonel's yard. The commanding officer happened to be seated on his veranda at the moment, and in close

confabulation with Dr. Quin. Both gentlemen ceased their talk as the captain entered, and then rose from their seats as he stepped upon the veranda floor.

"Good-evening, Stryker," said the colonel, cheerily. "Come in and have a seat. The doctor and I were just wondering if we could not get you to take a hand at whist to-night."

"I shall be glad to join you, sir, after parade. I have come in to ask permission to send a sergeant and a couple of men, mounted, down the Monee. One of my best men is missing."

"Indeed! Who is that? Send the men, of course."

"Sergeant Gwynne, sir. The first time I ever knew him to miss a duty."

"Your stable-sergeant, too? That *is* unusual. How long has he been gone?"

"Since battalion drill this morning. He was on hand when the men were saddling, and asked permission to take his horse out for exercise and ride down the valley a few miles. I said yes, never supposing he would be gone after noon roll-call; and we were astonished when he failed to appear at stables. Perry says he met him two miles out."

"The two culprits!" said the colonel, laughing. "Poor Perry is down in the depths again. He rode up to me with such a woebegone look on his face at drill this morning that I could hardly keep from laughing in front of the whole line. Even the men were trying hard not to grin: they knew he had turned up just in the nick of time to save himself an 'absent.' What do you suppose can have happened to Gwynne?"

"I cannot imagine, sir, and am inclined to be worried. He would never willingly overstay a pass; and I fear some accident has happened."

"Is he a good rider?" asked the doctor.

"None better in the regiment. He is a model horseman, in fact, and, though he never alludes to nor admits it, there is a general feeling among the men that he has been in the English cavalry service. Of course there is no doubt of his nationality: he is English to the backbone, and, I fancy, has seen better days."

"What made them think he had been in the cavalry service abroad?"

"Oh, his perfect knowledge of trooper duties and management of horses. It took him no time to learn the drill, and he was a sergeant before he had been with me two years. Then, if you ever noticed, colonel," said Captain Stryker, appealing to his chief, "whenever Gwynne stands attention he always has the fingers of both hands extended and pointing down along the thigh, close against it,—so." And Stryker illustrated. "Now, you never see an American soldier do that; and I never saw it in any but English-trained soldiers. He has quit it somewhat of late, because the men told him it showed where he was drilled,—we have other English 'non-coms.,' you know,—but for a long time I noticed that in him. Then he was enlisted in New York City, some four years ago, and all his things were of English make,—what he had."

"What manner of looking fellow is he?" asked the doctor. "I think I would have noted him had I seen him."

"Yes, you Englishmen are apt to look to one another," said the colonel, in reply, "and Gwynne is a particularly fine specimen. He has your eyes and hair, doctor, but hasn't had time to grow grizzled and bulky yet, as you and I have. One might say that you and the sergeant were from the same shire."

"That would help me very little, since I was only three years old when the governor emigrated," answered the doctor, with a quiet smile. "We keep some traces of the old sod, I suppose, but I've been a Yankee for forty years, and have never once set eyes on Merrie England in all that time.—Did the sergeant say where he wanted to go?" And the questioner looked up sharply.

"Nowhere in particular,—down the valley was all. I remember, though, that Mr. Parke said he seemed much exercised over the name of that ranch down the Monee,—I've forgotten what they call it.—Have you heard it, colonel?"

"Seems to me I have, but I've forgotten. *You* have, doctor, have you not?"

"Heard what, colonel?"

"The name of that ranch down the Monee,—an English ranch, they tell me, about seven miles away."

"Oh, yes!—that one! They call it Dunraven Ranch.—Did the sergeant take any of the hounds with him, captain? It occurs to me he might have been running a coyote or a rabbit, and his horse have stumbled and fallen with him. There is no end of prairie-dog holes down that way."

"No, the dogs are all in. I wouldn't be surprised if he had gone to the ranch. That's an English name, and they are all Englishmen down there, I hear. Very possibly that is the solution. They may have tempted him to stay with English hospitality; though it would astonish me if he yielded. I'll tell the men to inquire there first, colonel, and will go and send them now." And, bowing to his commander, Captain Stryker turned and left the porch.

The doctor rose, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, paced slowly to the southern end of the veranda, and gazed down the distant, peaceful valley, an anxious cloud settling on his brow. The colonel resumed once more the newspaper he had dropped upon the floor. After a moment Dr. Quin came slowly back, stood in front of the entrance a few seconds looking irresolutely at the soldier sprawled at full length in his reclining-chair, stepped towards him with a preparatory clearing of his throat as though about to speak, and then, suddenly and helplessly abandoning the idea, he plunged down the short flight of steps, hurried out of the gate, and disappeared around the fence-corner in the direction of the hospital. Immersed in his paper, the colonel never seemed to note that he had gone; neither did he note the fact that two ladies were coming down the walk. Possibly the vines clustering thickly all over the front of his veranda were responsible for this latter failure on his part, since it took more than a newspaper, ordinarily, to render the gallant dragoon insensible to the approach of the

opposite sex. They saw *him*, of course, despite the shrouding vines, and, with perfectly justifiable appreciation of the homage due them, were mutually resolved that he should come out of that reclining pose and make his bow in due form. No words were necessary between them. The understanding was tacit, but complete.

The soft swish of trailing skirt being insufficient to attract his attention as they arrived nearly opposite the shaded veranda, a silvery peal of laughter broke the stillness of the early evening. Mrs. Belknap's laugh was delicious,—soft, melodious, rippling as a canary's song, and just as spontaneous. Neither lady had said anything at the moment that was incentive of merriment; but if Mrs. Lawrence had given utterance to the quaintest, oddest, most whimsical conceit imaginable, Mrs. Belknap's laugh could not have been more ready, and her great, dark eyes shot a sidelong glance to note the effect. Down went the paper, and up, with considerable propping from his muscular arms, came the burly form of the post commander. Two sweet, smiling faces beamed upon him through an aperture in the leafy screen, and Mrs. Belknap's silvery voice hailed him in laughing salutation:

"Did we spoil your siesta, colonel? How *can* I make amends? You see, you were so hidden by the vines that no one would dream of your being there in ambush."

"Oh, indeed, I assure you I wasn't asleep," answered the colonel, hastily. "Won't you come in, ladies, and sit here in the shade awhile? You've been calling, I suppose?"

"Yes,—calling, on the entire social circle of Fort Rossiter. Congratulate us, colonel: we have actually accomplished the feat of visiting every woman in society. We have made the rounds of the garrison. We owe no woman anything,—beyond a grudge or two,—and it has only taken forty-five minutes, despite the fact that everybody was at home."

"Well, come in, Mrs. Belknap; *do* come in, Mrs. Lawrence. I assure you that, though everybody must have been enchanted to see you, nobody is half as glad as I am. You must be tired after such a round of visits." And the colonel plunged heavily down the steps and hospitably opened the gate.

"We thought we would stroll around until parade," said Mrs. Lawrence, hesitatingly, "and then sit down and watch it somewhere."

"No place better than this," promptly answered the colonel. "You can sit behind the vines on that side and see, or, what we would infinitely prefer, sit here at the entrance and be seen. Meantime, I've been unpacking some photograph-albums this afternoon, and you can amuse yourselves with those while I put on my harness. Come!"

The colonel's collection of photographs was something the ladies had already heard a great deal of. One of the most genial and popular officers in the army, he had gathered together several large albums full of pictures of prominent men and attractive and distinguished women,—not only those with whom he had been associated in his long years of service, but men eminent in national and state affairs, and women leaders in society in many a gay metropolis. Both the ladies had hoped to see this famous collection the evening before, but the colonel

had not then unpacked the albums, and they were disappointed. Now, however, the prospect was indeed alluring, and neither could resist. When the first call sounded for parade a few moments after, and the commanding officer was getting himself into his full-dress uniform, the two pretty heads were close together, and two pairs of very lovely eyes —one dark and deep and dangerous, the other a clear and honest gray —were dilating over page after page of photographed beauty. There was no need to puzzle over the identity of the originals: under each picture the thoughtful colonel had carefully written the name and address. Absorbed in this treat, they could barely afford time to look up and smile their thanks as the colonel passed, clanking forth at the sounding of adjutant's call, and were too completely engrossed in their delightful occupation to notice what took place at parade.

The long, slender line had formed,—the infantry companies on the right and left flanks, their neat and tasteful dress of blue and white contrasting favorably with the gaudy yellow plumage of the four dismounted troops of the cavalry. Company after company had taken the statuesque pose of "parade rest" and its captain faced to the front again, the adjutant was just about moving to his post on the prolongation of the front rank, and the colonel settling back into the conventional attitude of the commanding officer, when from outside the rectangular enclosure of the parade-ground—from somewhere beyond the men's barracks—there came sudden outcry and commotion. There were shouts, indistinguishable at first, but excited and startling. Some of the men in ranks twitched nervously and partially turned their heads, as though eager to look behind them and see what was wrong; whereat stern voices could be heard in subdued but potent censure: "Keep your eyes to the front, there, Sullivan!" "Stand fast, there, centre of Third Company!" The guard, too, paraded in front of its quarters some distance behind the line, was manifestly disturbed, and the voice of the sergeant could be heard giving hurried orders. Every man in the battalion seemed at the same instant to arrive at one of two conclusions,—prisoners escaping, or fire over at the stables,—and all eyes were fixed on the imperturbable form of the commanding officer, as though waiting the signal from him to break and go to the rescue. But there the colonel stood, placid, calm, and apparently utterly unconscious of the distant yet nearing clamor. The adjutant hesitated a moment before proceeding further, and glanced appealingly at his chief; whereupon there came from the blue and gold and yellow statue out on the parade, in half-reproachful tones, the quiet order, "Go on!" and the adjutant, recalled to his senses and with evident expression of his sentiments to the effect that if others could stand it *he* could, brusquely turned his head towards the band and growled, "Sound off!" The boom and crash of drum and cymbal and the blare of brazen throats drowned for a moment the sound of the turmoil without. The next thing the battalion heard, or saw, was a riderless horse tearing full tilt out on the parade and sweeping in a big circle from the right of the line down towards the point where the colonel stood. Following him came a pair of Cheyenne scouts, their ponies scampering in pursuit, but veering off the green as their riders realized that they were intruding

on the ceremony of the day. Relieved of his pursuers, the fugitive speedily settled down into a lunging trot, and with streaming mane and tail, with head and ears erect, with falling bridle-rein and flapping stirrups, he circled rapidly the open space between the colonel and the line of battle, then came trotting back along the front, as though searching in the stolid rank of bearded faces for the friends he knew. Officer after officer he passed in review until he came to Stryker's troop, posted on the right of the cavalry, and there, with a neigh of recognition, he fearlessly trotted up to the captain's outstretched hand. Another minute, and two men fell out and made a temporary gap in the rank; through this a sergeant file-closer extended his white glove, relieved the captain of his charge, and led the panting steed away. The men retook their places; the captain again resumed his position in front of the centre of his company, dropped the point of his sabre to the ground, and settled back into "parade rest;" the band went on thundering down the line, countermarched, and came back to its post on the right, making the welkin ring with the triumphant strains of "Northern Route," the trumpets pealed the "retreat," the adjutant stalked his three yards to the front, faced fiercely to the left and shouted his resonant orders down the line, three hundred martial forms sprang to attention, and the burnished arms came to the "carry" with simultaneous crash, ranks were opened with old-time precision, the parade "presented" to the colonel with all due formality, the manual was executed just as punctiliously as though nothing unusual had happened; first-sergeants reported, orders were published, parade formally dismissed; the line of officers marched solidly to the front, halted, and made its simultaneous salute to the colonel, who slowly raised and lowered his white-gloved hand in recognition; and then, and not till then, was any one allowed to speak of what was uppermost in every mind,—that Sergeant Gwynne's horse had come in without him, and that the animal's right flank was streaming with blood.

Ten minutes later, Lieutenant Perry, in riding-dress, came hurrying down to the colonel's quarters, where two or three officers were now gathered at the gate. The ladies had put aside the albums, and with anxious faces were scanning the little group, as though striving to gauge from their gestures and expression the extent of the calamity or the possible degree of danger. But Mrs. Lawrence looked fairly startled when her husband's voice was heard for the first time above the general hum of consultation:

"Colonel Brainard, Mr. Perry is coming, I see, and I presume there is no time to be lost. You have asked if none of us who were stationed here ever visited the ranch, and the answer was no. May I suggest that Dr. Quin could perhaps tell something of its inhabitants?"

"Where is the doctor?" asked the colonel, turning suddenly. "Orderly, go and give my compliments to the post surgeon and say I wish to see him here a moment.—All ready, Perry? You have made quick work of it."

"All ready, sir. At least, I will be the moment my horse gets here. There go the men running to the stables now."

"Captain Stryker will send a sergeant and four men to report to

you, and you are to go direct to Dunraven Ranch. The rest of the troop, with the Cheyennes, will scout the prairie to the east and south. 'Twill soon be too dark to trail, but three of the Indians are going back on the horse's track as far as they can. The adjutant is writing a note to the proprietor of the ranch,—I don't know his name——"

"His name is Maitland, sir."

"Is it? Have you been there?"

"I've been around one end of it, outside, but nowhere near the buildings. It's all fenced in, sir, and the gates kept locked."

"What an incomprehensible proceeding for Texas! Wait a moment while I speak to Mr. Farnham: he's writing here at my desk. —Gentlemen, come in on the porch and sit down, will you not?"

But they excused themselves, and hastened away to remove their full dress. Captain Lawrence had no need to call his wife. She bade her companion good-evening, thanked the colonel with a smiling glance for the pleasure the photographs had given her, and added a word of earnest hope that they might find the sergeant uninjured. Then she joined her husband, and together they walked quickly away. Mrs. Belknap and Mr. Perry were left for the moment alone.

"Can you walk home with me?" she asked, in her low, modulated tones, the great, heavily-lashed, swimming dark eyes searching his face. "I have not seen you since they broke in upon our talk last evening, and there is something I want to ask you."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Belknap, but I'm on duty, you see," was the young fellow's answer as he gave a tug to the strap of his cartridge-belt. "Can't you ask me here?"

"How can I?"—and the eyes were full of pathetic disappointment,— "when they may come out any moment? You did not finish telling me about—about the tassel last night. I believe you were glad when they interrupted us. Were you not?"

"Nonsense, Mrs. Belknap! I was having too good a time,—lots of fun."

"Yes," was the reproachful answer, "that is what it was—to you, —mere fun. And now you are going away again, after promising to come in this evening."

"I have to go, Mrs. Belknap. Why, I *want* to go. Haven't you heard what has happened,—about Sergeant Gwynne?"

"Oh, yes, it is your duty, of course; but how unlucky!" And the pretty face was drooping with its weight of disappointment and sadness. She leaned against the railing near his gauntlet-covered hand, the dark eyes pensively downcast, the dark lashes sweeping her soft, flushing cheek. "And to-morrow you are on guard," she presently continued.

"Yes, unless some one has to go on for me,—in case we are not back in the morning in time."

"Then it's good-by, I suppose," she said, lifting her eyes once more to his. "After to-morrow there will be little chance of seeing you. Mrs. Page will be here by that time."

Mr. Perry looked at his fair companion with a glance that told of much perturbation of spirit. Mrs. Page was an old and cherished

friend of Mrs. Belknap's,—so the latter had always said,—and now she was coming to visit her from a station in the Indian Territory. Just why *her* coming should prevent his seeing Mrs. Belknap or her seeing him was more than the tall subaltern could understand. On the brink of an unpardonable solecism, on the very ragged edge of a blundering inquiry, he was saved—in her estimation—by the sudden return of the orderly and the reappearance of the colonel.

"I've been to the hospital, sir, and to the doctor's quarters: he's not there. They say that's him, sir, riding off yonder." And the orderly pointed to a faint speck just visible in the waning twilight, far away southeastward beyond the Monee.

VI.

Twilight still hovered over the broad expanse of prairie when Lieutenant Perry and his little party, after a brisk canter down the valley, reached the barbed enclosure of Dunraven, and the young commander led unhesitatingly to the gate-way on the northern line. A sergeant of his troop and two private soldiers were his escort at the moment; a third man, by direction of Colonel Brainard, had been sent at the gallop in pursuit of the distant speck which the orderly had pronounced to be Dr. Quin, and the instructions which this messenger bore were to the effect that the post surgeon should ride by the most direct route and join Lieutenant Perry at the north gate of the ranch. In the few minutes which elapsed between the announcement of the doctor's departure on his solitary and unexpected ride and the arrival of the little mounted escort, Perry had time to tell the colonel something of the situation down the Monee and to make a rough sketch of the enclosure and the distant buildings. The direction taken by the doctor, up to the moment when the black speck disappeared from view in the waning light, would be very apt to lead him, if he rode far enough, to some point on the wire fence which spanned the western limit of Dunraven; but that point would be at least five or six miles south of the valley. Possibly there was no gate-way north of that,—certainly no trail was visible on the prairie,—but the more Mr. Perry thought of the matter as he rode away the more was he satisfied that somewhere far down that western line there was an entrance where Dr. Quin, at least, had the "open sesame." All the grazing thus far had been done north of the Monee; all the hunting and coursing, too, had been found best in every way far out to the north and east of the post; and so it happened that no one of the —th seemed to have acquired any knowledge of the English ranch. What the local infantry command was able to tell of it was purely hearsay. None of the officers had ever penetrated the charmed enclosure, and no one of the soldiers was known to have done so. Perry remembered hearing that the Eleventh while stationed there had made some scouts and expeditions out to the south, and that some of these had completely circled the broad lands of the estate, finding well-travelled roads leading from its southern boundaries to the settlements two days' journey farther towards the Gulf; but nowhere was there open or unguarded gap.

Cattle with the Dunraven brand roamed the breaks and prairies far away towards the eastern streams, and crossed even the broad trail over which the great Texas "drive" of "long-horns," year after year, passed up across the valley of the Washita. Other cattle, of choicer breed, were carefully herded within the wire enclosure; but, thanks to the vigilance of the manager and the exertions of his few skilled assistants, none of their wandering chattels seemed ever to venture up-stream towards the fort, and all excuse for a visit there was apparently guarded against. These meagre points he had gathered from the remarks of one or two officers who had come to see him off, and, ignorant of his morning expedition, to offer suggestions as to his best course.

His orders were, in case nothing was seen or heard of Sergeant Gwynne while on the way thither, to enter the enclosure and make inquiries at the ranch itself. Meantime, the Cheyenne scouts had been hastily summoned from their lodges along the Monee just above the post and sent scurrying forth upon the prairie to trail the horse's footprints and so work back as far as possible before darkness interposed. Captain Stryker, too, and a dozen of his best men, had mounted and ridden forth in long, scattered line across the eastern plain; and these parties were all five miles out from the post before nightfall fairly hid them from view.

One thing the sergeant had to tell Mr. Perry which confirmed him in the belief that the sooner they got to Dunraven the quicker they would be at the scene of their comrade's mishap, whatever that might prove to be. He had had no time himself to visit the stables and examine the wounds on the horse's flank, but as they rode away from Rossiter he turned in the saddle and called the non-commissioned officer to his side.

"What sort of wound is it, sergeant, that made that horse bleed so, —bullet or knife?"

"It doesn't look like either, sir. There are several of them,—jagged scratches in the shoulder and along the flank, like thorns or nails——"

"Or barbed wire?" suggested the lieutenant, suddenly.

"Yes, sir, like as not; though we hadn't thought of that, not knowing of any fences hereabouts."

"You'll see fence enough presently. That's where we'll find Sergeant Gwynne, too. Let your horses out a little. I want to get there before dark, if possible."

It was dark in the timber, however, as they rode through and reined up at the gate-way. It would be half an hour at the very least, thought Perry, before the doctor could join them, if he came at all. It was by no means certain that the messenger had overtaken him, and, even if he had, was it probable that the doctor would be in great haste to come? His mysterious movements of the morning, his undoubted connection with the night-signals from the ranch, the fact that he had given his commanding officer no inkling whatever of these outside interests of his, all tended to make Perry distrustful of their post surgeon. He would not speak of it to a soul, or hint at the possibility of such a thing, until he had evidence that was indisputable, but the young officer was sorely perplexed by these indications of some secret and

unlawful enterprise on the part of their new comrade, and he doubted his sympathy in the mission on which they had been hurried forth.

Dismounting to examine the gate while still pondering this matter over in his mind, Perry found it locked as securely as he had left it in the morning. The sergeant and his men dismounted, too, at a low-spoken word from their officer, and stood at the heads of their panting horses, looking in silent surprise at the strong and impervious barrier that crossed their track.

"The gate is locked and the fence impassable, sergeant," said Mr. Perry. "We cannot get our horses through or over unless we hack down a post or two. You can't cut such wire as this with any tool we've got. I'll leave Nolan here with you and go on to the ranch on foot: it lies about half a mile to the south. If the doctor comes, he can follow me. If I do not come or send back in half an hour from this, you three come after me, for I'll need you."

With that, slowly and carefully, and not without a muttered malediction on the stinging barbs, Mr. Perry wriggled through between the middle wires, and finally stood within the enclosure, readjusting his waist-belt and holster. Then he took his revolver from its leathern case, carefully tried the hammer and cylinder, saw that each chamber was loaded, and turned once more to the sergeant.

"Your pistols all right?"

"All right, sir,—fresh loaded when we started."

"I don't know that they'll be necessary at all, sergeant, but this is a queer place, from what I've heard and the little I've seen. Keep your eyes and ears open. Captain Stryker and some of the men may come down into the valley if they find no trace of Gwynne up on the prairie. Watch for the doctor, too."

Then, through the deepening twilight he strode, following the trail that led southward up the slopes. Five minutes' brisk walk along the springy turf brought him to the crest and in view of the lights at the ranch-buildings, still some six or seven hundred yards away. All through the eastern sky the stars were peeping forth, and even through the gleam of the twilight in the west two brilliant planets shone like molten gold. All was silence and peace on every hand, and, but for those guiding, glimmering lights at the south, all would have told of desolation. Behind him in the valley waited his faithful men. Far beyond the Monee, out on the northern prairie, he knew that comrades were scouring the face of the earth in search of their missing brother. Up the stream, somewhere behind them, the Cheyennes were patiently trailing the hoof-tracks as long as the light should last; he knew that search must be at an end by this time, and that some of their number, at least, would be riding down to join his men. Whoever found the sergeant was to fire three shots in air: the signal could be heard a long way in that intense stillness, and that signal was to recall the searching-parties. Every step brought him deeper into the darkness of the night, yet nearer and nearer those twinkling lights ahead. Already he could distinguish those in the main building, the homestead, from those more distant still, in the store-rooms and office. Far over among the stables and corrals he heard the deep baying of hounds, and he wondered if

it was to be his luck to encounter any enterprising watch-dogs. An English bull-terrier would be a lively entertainer, thought he, with instinctive motion towards the flap of his holster; and it would be a wonder if a ranch that surrounded itself with fifty miles of barbed wire fencing were not further environed by a pack of watch-dogs of the most approved and belligerent breed. Once having passed the distant barrier of that gate on the Monee, however, his way was unimpeded, and, to all appearance, utterly unmarked; he had arrived within fifty yards of the foremost building, the homestead, before he was brought to a halt. Then he stopped short, surprised, half credulous, and all attention, listening to the "concord of sweet sounds" that came floating from the open casement somewhere along the east front of the big, gloomy house.

"One part of the story verified, by Jove! It's a piano,—and well played, too."

Full a minute he stood there listening. Perry was a dancer whose nimble feet moved blithely to any measured, rhythmical strains, and a soldier whose soul was stirred by martial music, but with Chopin and Mendelssohn, Bach and Rubinstein, he had but slight acquaintance. That any one should be playing a piano here on the borders of the Llano Estacado was in itself sufficient cause for wonderment; that the invisible performer was playing—and playing with exquisite taste and feeling—one of the loveliest of the "Lieder ohne Worte," the Spring Song, was a fact that conveyed no added astonishment to his soul: he never knew it until one sweet night long after.

However, matters more pressing than music demanded Mr. Perry's attention just here. He had reached Dunraven, after all. Neither dog nor man had challenged. Once within those barbed and frowning barriers, all the encircling objects spoke of security and rest. Far away towards the corrals he heard the sound of voices in jolly conversation; a rich, melodious laugh rang out on the cool evening air; he heard some one shouting genial good-night to somebody else, and then the slam of a distant door. Presently a light popped out from a window in what he believed to be a storehouse, and all was still again. Even the piano had ceased. Now was his time, thought Perry; and so, boldly mounting the steps, he stood upon a dark portico and strode to the black shadow in the wall before him where he knew the main door-way must be. It was his intention to knock or ring. Up-stairs dim lights were shining through the open windows, but on this front of the ground-floor all was darkness. His gauntleted hand felt all the face of the door in search of knob or knocker, but nothing of the kind was there; neither was there such a thing on either door-post. Just as he decided to hammer with his clinched fist, the piano began again. He waited for a pause, but none came. This time the music was vehement and spirited, and no banging of his on oaken door-way would be audible against such rivalry. Uncertain what to do, he concluded to reconnoitre the eastern front. A few steps brought him to the corner, and there lay the veranda before him, bathed at its farther end in a flood of light that streamed from one opened venetian window, and through this curtained aperture poured the grand tones of the

melody. "That fellow can rattle more music out of a piano than any man I ever heard," muttered Mr. Perry to himself, as he strode down the wooden gallery. "Wonder if it's that boss cow-puncher I met this morning." Another moment, and he stood at the open window, rooted to the spot, and with his frank blue eyes fairly starting from their sockets in amazement at the sight that met them, all unprepared.

Across a spacious room, hung with rich curtains, carpeted with costly rugs of Oriental make, furnished with many a cosey chair and couch, and tables covered with dainty *bric-à-brac*, and shelves with tempting books, lighted by several large and beautiful astral lamps, some with colored shades of crimson and gold and delicate tint of blue, there stood close to the opposite wall a large piano of the class known as the "grand," rare enough among the railway towns west of the Mississippi States, but utterly unlooked for here, a week's long march from the nearest of the Texan railways. That in itself were sufficient cause for much surprise, notwithstanding the measure of preparation he had had in Mrs. Lawrence's remarks.

The sight that wellnigh took his breath away was something far more than the interior of a luxurious and beautifully-appointed room. *Nothing* that had been said or hinted prepared him in the faintest degree for the apparition, facing him, seated at the piano, of a performer utterly unlike the "cow-puncher" whom he had met in the morning. The "fellow" now bending over the key-board was a young, exquisitely fair, and graceful woman. Even as he stood there in the full glare of the parlor lights, she lifted up a pair of soft, shaded, lustrous eyes and saw him.

The music stopped with sudden shock. Tannhäuser was undone. The firm, white, shapely hands fell nerveless in her lap; a pallor as of faintness shot over the wild-eyed face, only to be instantly succeeded by a flush that surged up to the very brows. Startled she might have been for an instant; scared,—not a bit of it! One instant only of hesitation, then she rose and swept gallantly forward to meet him.

Instinctively Perry's hand went up to the visor of his forage-cap and bared the bright, curling crop of hair. Speechless with amaze, he could only bow before her and wait her question; but it was a moment before she could speak. Brave as she was, the sudden apparition of a stranger staring in upon her solitude from an open casement was a shock that served to paralyze the vocal cords. He could see that she was making gallant effort to control the tremor that had seized upon her and to inquire the purpose of his coming. He could see, too, that the sight of the uniform had reassured her, and that there was neither indignation nor displeasure in her beautiful eyes. Reserve, of course, he expected.

"Did you wish to see any one?" was finally the form her question took; and Perry had time to comment to himself, "English, by Jove!" before he answered,—

"I did; but let me first ask your pardon for this intrusion. I had no idea there was a woman at Dunraven. My knocking at the front brought no answer, and, hearing the piano, I followed the veranda. Believe me, I am as surprised as you could possibly have been."

Perry's voice was something greatly in his favor. It was modulated and gentle when in conversation, and with even a caressing tone about it when he spoke to women. Evidently the sound was not unwelcome to this one. She stood erect, her fingers interlacing as she clasped her hands in front of her and looked him well over with her brave eyes. The color ebbed and flowed through the creamy whiteness of her face, but the roses were winning every moment,—the red roses of the house of Lancaster.

"And—you wished to see—whom?" she presently asked, with courtesy in every word.

"Why, I hardly know," answered Perry, with a smile that showed his white teeth gleaming through the curling blond moustache. "A sergeant of my troop has been missing since morning. His horse came back to the fort just as we were on parade at sunset, bleeding and without his rider. We have searching-parties out all over the prairie, and I was ordered to come here to the ranch to make inquiries."

She hesitated a moment,—thinking.

"My father is at home, but I fear he is not well enough to see you. Mr. Ewen is with him, and he might know. Will you—would you step in one moment, and I will go and ask?"

"Thank you very much. I wish you would not trouble yourself. I presume I can go over to those stable-buildings, or wherever it is the men sleep: they would be most apt to know if our sergeant has been seen."

"Oh, no! it is no trouble; besides, they are all asleep over there by this time, I fancy. They have to be out so very early, don't you know?"

But Perry had stepped inside even as he offered to go elsewhere,—a fact that the girl had not been slow to notice, for a quizzical little shadow of a smile hovered for an instant at the corners of her pretty mouth. "Pray sit down," she said, as she vanished into an adjoining room, leaving Ned Perry standing gazing after her, spell-bound.

He listened to the swish of her trailing skirts through the dimly-lighted room beyond, through an invisible hall-way, and then to the quick pit-a-pat of her feet up some uncarpeted stairway. He heard her moving quickly, lightly, along the corridor of the upper story until the foot-falls were lost at the rear of the house, then a distant tap upon a door-way, and a soft voice, barely audible, calling, "Papa." He heard her speak again, as though in response to inquiry from within; he heard her raise her voice, as though to repeat an answer to a previous question, and this time her words were distinct. "An officer from the fort," she announced; and then followed sensation.

He heard a door quickly opened; he heard men's voices in low, eager, excited talk; he heard her sweet tones once more, as though in expostulation, saying something about the sergeant, lost or wounded, and they were merely inquiring for him; he heard a stern, harsh injunction of "Silence! that will do!" some quick, hurrying footsteps, a man's spurred boots descending some staircase at the back of the house, a colloquy aloft in fainter tones, and then—closing doors and silence. He waited five—ten minutes, and still no one came; but the murmur of voices in subdued but earnest controversy was again audible

on the second floor, and at last a door was opened and he heard the same stern tones that had commanded her silence before, and this time they said,—

"That is entirely my affair! I will see the gentleman myself, and let him know my opinion of this impudent and—and—burglarious intrusion."

"Whew!" whistled Mr. Perry to himself at sound of these menacing words. "This is bearding the lion in his den with a vengeance! Now trot out your 'Douglas in his hall,' and let's see what it all means. I've seen the girl, anyhow, and he can't take *that* back, even if he turns me out."

He heard a heavy step, accented by the sharp, energetic prodding of a cane; it came slowly along the hall, slowly and majestically down the stairs, slowly into the lower front room, and presently there loomed forth from the darkness into the broad glare of the astrals at the hanging *portières* the figure of a tall, gray-haired, spectacled, slimly-built, and fragile-looking Englishman, erect as pride and high spirit could hold a man against the ravages of age and rheumatism; sharp, stern, and imperious of mood, as every glance and every feature plainly told; vehement and passionate, unless twitching lips and frowning brows and angry, snapping eyes belied him; a man who had suffered much, unless the deep lines and shadows under eyes and mouth meant nothing but advancing years; a man who entered full of wrath and resentment at this invasion of his privacy,—this forcing of his guarded lines; and yet—a gentleman, unless Ned Perry's instincts were all of little worth.

The young soldier had been standing by a centre-table, coolly scanning the pictures on the walls, and determining to present a rather exaggerated picture of nonchalance as reward for the hostile language of the proprietor of Dunraven. He expected to hear an outburst of invective when that gentleman reached the room; but no sooner had he passed the *portière* than he halted short, and Mr. Perry, turning suddenly, was amazed at the pale, startled, yet yearning look in his quivering face. The moment the young man confronted him there came as sudden a change. It was with evident effort that he controlled himself, and then, after brief searching study of Perry's face, accosted him,—coldly and with sarcastic emphasis:

"To what circumstance do I owe the honor of this intrusion?"

"I regret you so consider it, Mr. Maitland,—as I believe you to be——" The old gentleman bowed with stately dignity. "One of our men, a sergeant, rode down this way quite early this morning and failed to return. His horse came back, bleeding, at sunset, and we feared some accident or trouble. Searching-parties are out all over the prairies, and the colonel ordered me to inquire here."

"Does your colonel take us for banditti here, and ascribe your desertions and accidents to our machinations?"

"Far from it, sir, but rather as a hospitable refuge to which the injured man had been conveyed," answered Perry, with a quiet smile, determined to thaw the *hauteur* of Dunraven's lord if courtesy of manner could effect it.

"He is utterly mistaken, then," answered the Englishman, "and I resent—I resent, sir, this forcing of my gates after the explicit understanding we had last year. As a soldier I presume you had to obey your orders; but I beg you to tell your colonel that his order was an affront to me personally, in view of what has passed between us."

"Nothing has passed between you, Mr. Maitland," answered Perry, a little tartly now. "We have reached Fort Rossiter only within the last fortnight, and know nothing whatever of your understandings with previous commanders. Permit me to ask you one question, and I will retire. Have you heard anything of our sergeant?"

"Nothing, sir. I would hardly be apt to hear, for my people here are enjoined to keep strictly to our limits, and all we ask of our neighbors is that they keep to theirs. I presume you have destroyed my fences, sir, in order to effect an entrance."

"Upon my word, Mr. Maitland, you make me rather regret that I did not; but I had the decency to respect what I had happened to hear of your wishes, and so left my horse and my men outside, and footed it a good half-mile in the dark——"

"Ah! that sounds very like it!" replied Mr. Maitland, with writhing lips, for at this moment there came the dull thunder of rapidly-advancing hoof-beats, and before either man could speak again three troopers with a led horse—all four steeds panting from their half-mile race—reined up in front of the eastern portico in the full glare of the lights, and the sergeant's voice was heard eagerly hailing his lieutenant.

"My luck again!" groaned Perry. "I told them to come in half an hour if they didn't hear from me, and of course they came."

VII.

For a moment there was silence in the brightly-illuminated room. With flushed face and swollen veins and twitching, clutching hands, old Maitland stood there glaring at the young officer. Before Perry could speak again, however, and more fully explain the untoward circumstance, there came a rush of hurrying footsteps without, and the sound of excited voices. The next minute they heard an eager, angry challenge, and Perry recognized the voice of the overseer or manager whom he had met in the morning.

"What do you fellows want here?" was his brusque and loud inquiry as he sprang from the piazza and stood confronting the sergeant, who was quietly seated in the saddle, and the question was promptly echoed by three or four burly men who, in shirt-sleeves and various styles of undress, came tumbling in the wake of their leader and stood now a menacing group looking up at the silent troopers.

If there be one thing on earth that will stir an Irishman's soul to its inmost depths and kindle to instant flame the latent heat of his pugnacity, it is just such an inquiry in the readily recognized accent of the hated "Sassenach." Perry recognized the danger in a flash, and, springing through the open casement, interposed between the hostile parties.

"Not a word, Sergeant Leary. Here, Mr. Manager, these men simply obeyed orders, and I am responsible for any mistake. No harm was intended——"

"Harm!" broke in one of the ranchmen, with a demonstratively loud laugh. "Harm be blowed! What harm could you do, I'd like to know? If the master'll only say the word, we'd break your heads in a minute."

"Quiet, now, Dick!" interposed the overseer; but the other hands growled approval, and Perry's eyes flashed with anger at the insult. What reply he might have made was checked by the sight of Sergeant Leary throwing himself from the saddle and tossing his reins to one of the men. He knew well enough what that meant, and sprang instantly in front of him.

"Back to your horse, sir! Back, instantly!" for the sergeant's face was fierce with rage. "Mount, I say!" added the lieutenant, as the sergeant still hesitated, and even the sense of discipline could not keep the mounted troopers from a muttered word of encouragement. Slowly, wrathfully, reluctantly, the soldier obeyed, once turning furiously back as jeering taunts were hurled at him from among the ranchers, unrebuked by their manager. "Now move off with your men to the gate. Leave my horse, and wait for me there. Go!" added the young officer, sternly; and, with bitter mortification at heart and a curse stifled on his quivering lips, the Irishman turned his horse's head away and slowly walked him in the indicated direction.

"Now, Mr. Manager," said Perry, turning fiercely upon the younger Englishman, "I have done my best to restrain my men: do you look out for yours. You have allowed them to insult me and mine, and you may thank your stars that discipline prevailed with my people, though you have nothing of the kind here."

"Your men have cut down our fences, by your order, I presume," said the manager, coolly, "and it's lucky for them they got out of the way when they did. We have a right to protect our property and eject intruders, and——"

"I came here to inquire for a missing man,—a right even an Englishman cannot deny us on these prairies. We had excellent reason to believe him injured, and thought, not knowing you for the inhospitable gang you are, that he might have been carried in here for treatment: there *was* no other place. Your proprietor tells me he is not here. After what I've seen of your people, I have reason to be still more anxious about him. Scant mercy a single trooper would have had at their hands. Now I ask *you*, Do you know or have you heard of a cavalry soldier being seen around here during the day?"

Perry was standing holding his horse by the curb as he spoke, facing the parlor windows and confronting the angry group of ranchmen. Within, though nearer the window than he had left him, was the bent form of the owner of Dunraven, leaning on his cane and apparently impatiently striving to make himself heard as he came forward. Before the manager could answer, he was compelled to turn about and rebuke his men, two of whom were especially truculent and menacing. Finally he spoke:

"I have heard nothing, but I tell you frankly that if any of your men have been prowling around here it's more than probable some one has got hurt. Has there been any trouble to-day, men?" he asked.

"By God, there *will* be if this ranch isn't cleared in five minutes," was the only answer.

"Don't make an ass of yourself, Hoke," growled the manager. "They are going quick enough."

"I *am* going," said Perry, swinging lightly into saddle; "and mind you this, sir: I go with well-warranted suspicion that some of these bullies of yours have been responsible for the non-appearance of my stable-sergeant. If he is not found this night, you may confidently look for another visit. I say that to you also, Mr. Maitland; and you owe it to our forbearance that there has been no bloodshed here to-night."

Old Maitland's tremulous tones were heard but a second in reply when he was interrupted by a coarse voice from the crowd of ranchmen, by this time increased to nearly a dozen men. Some of them were gathering about Perry as he sat in the saddle, and an applauding echo followed the loud interruption,—

"Give the swell a lift, Tummy: 'twill teach him better manners."

Almost instantly Perry felt his right foot grasped and a powerful form was bending at the stirrup. He had heard of the trick before. Many a time has the London cad unhorsed the English trooper, taken unawares, by hurling him with sudden lift from below. But Perry was quick and active as a cat. Seat and saddle, too, were in his favor. He simply threw his weight on the left foot and his bridle-hand upon the pommel, let the right leg swing over the horse's back until released from the brawny hand, then back it came as he settled again in the saddle, his powerful thighs gripping like a vise; at the same instant, and before his assailant could duck to earth and slip out of the way, he had whipped out the heavy Colt's revolver and brought its butt with stunning crash down on the ranchman's defenceless head.

There was instant rush and commotion. In vain old Maitland feebly piped his protests from the veranda; in vain the overseer seized and held back one or two of the men and furiously called off the rest. Aided by the darkness which veiled them, the others made a simultaneous rush upon the young officer and sought to drag him from his plunging horse. Perry held his pistol high in air, threatening with the butt the nearest assailant, yet loath to use further force. He was still in the broad glare of the parlor lights,—a conspicuous mark; eager hands had grasped his bridle-rein at the very bit, and he could not break away; and then missiles began to fly about his devoted head, and unless he opened fire he was helpless. While two men firmly held Nolan by the curb, half a dozen others were hurling from the ambush of darkness a scattering volley of wooden billets and chunks of coal. He could easily have shot down the men who held him. It was sore temptation, for already he had been struck and stung by unseen projectiles; but just as the manager sprang forward and with vigorous cuffs induced the men to loose their hold on his rein, there came three horsemen charging full tilt back into the crowd, scattering the assailants right and left; and, this time unrebuked, Sergeant Leary leaped from

the saddle and with a rage of fierce delight pitched headlong into battle with the biggest ranchman in his way. And this was not all; for behind them at rapid trot came other troopers, and in a moment the open space was thronged with eager, wondering comrades,—full half of Stryker's company,—in whose overwhelming presence all thought of promiscuous combat seemed to leave the ranchmen. They slipped away in the darkness, leaving to their employers the embarrassment of accounting for their attack. Leary was still fuming with wrath and raging for further battle and shouting into the darkness fierce invective at the vanished head of his opponent. He turned on the overseer himself, and but for Perry's stern and sudden prohibition would have had a round with him, but was forced to content himself with the information conveyed to all within hearing that he'd "fight any tin min" the ranch contained if they'd only come out where the lieutenant couldn't stop him. The troopers were making eager inquiry as to the cause of all the trouble, and, fearing further difficulty, Perry promptly ordered the entire party to "fall in." Silence and discipline were restored in a moment, and as the platoon formed rank he inquired of a sergeant how they came to be there. The reply was that it had grown so dark on the prairie that further search seemed useless, Captain Stryker and most of the men had been drawn off by signals from the Cheyennes up the valley towards the post, and these men, who had been beyond Dunraven on the northern prairie, were coming back along the Monee trail when they saw the lights and heard voices over at the lower shore. There they found Leary, who was excited about something, and before they had time to ask he suddenly shouted, "They're killin' the lieutenant. Come on, boys!" and galloped off with his own party: so they followed. Perry quietly ordered them to leave a corporal and four men with him, and told the senior sergeant to march the others back to the post: he would follow in five minutes. Then he turned to the manager:

"You will have to put up with my keeping some of my men with me, in view of all the circumstances," he said, coldly. "But after this exhibition of lawlessness on the part of your people I do not propose to take any chances. I want to say to you that it is my belief that some of those ruffians you employ can tell what has become of our missing man, and that you will do well to investigate to-night. As to you, Mr. Maitland," he said, turning to the old gentleman, who had sunk into a low easy-chair, "much as I regret having disturbed your privacy and—that of the—ladies of your household, you will admit now that justice to my men and to the service demands that I should report my suspicions and my reception here to the commanding officer at Fort Rossiter."

There was no reply.

"I wish you good-night, sir," said Perry; but his eyes wandered in to the lighted parlor in search of a very different face and form,—and still there was no answer.

The manager came back upon the piazza and stepped rapidly towards them. Perry quickly dismounted and bent down over the crouching figure.

"Why, here!" he suddenly exclaimed, "your employer is faint, or —something's gone wrong."

"Hush!" was the low-spoken, hurried answer of the Englishman. "Just bear a hand, will you, and help me lift him to yonder sofa?"

Easily, between them, they bore the slight, attenuated form of the old man into the lighted parlor. A deathly pallor had settled on his face. His eyes were closed, and he seemed fallen into a deep swoon. Perry would have set a cushion under his head as they laid him down on a broad, easy couch, but the manager jerked it away, lowering the gray hairs to the very level of the back, so that the mouth gaped wide and looked like death itself.

"Just steady his head in that position one minute, like a good fellow. I'll be back in a twinkling," said the manager, as he darted from the room and leaped hurriedly up the hall stairway.

Perry heard him rap at a distant door apparently at the southwest angle of the big house. Then his voice was calling, "Mrs. Cowan! Mrs. Cowan! would you have the goodness to come down quick? the master's ill."

Then, before any answer could be given, another door opened aloft, and trailing skirts and light foot-falls came flashing down the stairway. Almost before he could turn to greet her, *she* was in the room again, and with quick, impulsive movement had thrown herself on her knees by his side.

"Oh, papa! *dear* father! I was afraid of this! Let me take his head on my arm, *so*," she hurriedly murmured; "and would you step in the other room and fetch me a little brandy? 'Tis there on the side-board."

Perry sprang to do her bidding, found a heavy decanter on the great oaken buffet, half filled a glass, and brought it with some water back to the lounge. She stretched forth her hand, and, thanking him with a grateful look from her sweet, anxious eyes, took the liquor and carried it carefully to her father's ashen lips.

"Can I not help you in some way? Is there no one I can call?" asked the young soldier, as he bent over her.

"Mr. Ewen has gone for her,—our old nurse, I mean. She does not seem to be in her room, and I fear she has gone over to her son's,—a young fellow at the storehouse. Mr. Ewen has followed by this time."

She dipped her slender white fingers in the water and sprinkled the forehead and eyelids of the prostrate man. A feeble moan, followed by a deep-drawn sigh, was the only response. More brandy poured into the gaping mouth seemed only to strangle and distress him. No sign of returning consciousness rewarded her effort.

"If Mrs. Cowan would only come! She has never failed us before; and we so lean upon her at such a time."

"Pray tell me which way to go. Surely I can find her," urged Perry.

"Mr. Ewen must be searching for her now, or he would have returned by this time; and I dread being alone. I have never been alone with father when he has had such a seizure."

Perry threw himself on his knees beside her, marvelling at the odd fate that had so suddenly altered all the conditions of his unlooked-for visit. He seized one of the long, tremulous hands that lay so nerveless on the couch, and began rapid and vigorous chafing and slapping. Somewhere he had read or heard of women being restored from fainting-spells by just such means. Why should it not prevail with the old man? He vaguely bethought him of burnt feathers, and looked about for the discarded pillow, wondering if it might not be a brilliant idea to cut it open and extract a handful and set it ablaze under those broad and eminently aristocratic nostrils. Happily, he was spared excuse for further experiment. He felt that life was returning to the hand he was so energetically grooming, and that feeble but emphatic protest against such heroic treatment was manifest.

"I think he's coming to," he said. "He's trying to pull away. Shall I keep on?"

"Yes, do! Anything rather than have him lie in this death-like swoon."

Obediently he clung to his prize, rubbing and chafing hard, despite increasing tug and effort. Then came another feeble, petulant moan, and the hollow eyes opened just as rapid foot-falls were heard on the veranda without and Mr. Ewen rushed breathless and ruddy-faced into the room.

"Where on earth can that woman have gone?" he panted. "I cannot find her anywhere. Is he better, Miss Gladys?"

"Reviving, I think, thanks to Mr.——thanks to you," she said, turning her eyes full upon the kneeling figure at her side and sending Perry's heart up into his throat with delight at the gratitude and kindness in her glance. She was striving with one hand to unfasten the scarf and collar at the old man's neck, but making little progress.

"Let me help you," eagerly said Perry. "That, at least, is more in my line." And somehow their fingers touched as he twisted at the stubborn knot. She drew her hand away then, but it was gently, not abruptly done, and he found time to note that too, and bless her for it.

"I hate to seem ungracious, you know, after all that's happened," said Mr. Ewen, "but I fear 'twill vex him awfully if he should find you in here when he comes to. He has had these attacks for some time past, and I think he's coming through all right. See!"

Old Maitland was certainly beginning to open his eyes again and look vacantly around him.

"Better leave him to Miss Gladys," said the overseer, touching the young fellow on the shoulder. Perry looked into her face to read her wishes before he would obey. A flush was rising to her cheek, a cloud settling about her young eyes, but she turned, after a quick glance at her father.

"I cannot thank you enough—now," she said, hesitatingly. "Perhaps Mr. Ewen is right. You—you deserve to be told the story of his trouble, you have been so kind. Some day you shall understand,—soon,—and not think unkindly of us."

"Indeed I do not now," he protested.

"And—whom are we to thank?—your name, I mean?" she timidly asked.

"I am Mr. Perry, of the —th Cavalry. We have only come to Fort Rossiter this month."

"And I am Miss Maitland. Some day I *can* thank you." And she held forth her long, slim hand. He took it very reverently and bowed over it, courtier-like, longing to say something that might fit the occasion; but before his scattered senses could come to him there was another quick step at the veranda, and a voice that sounded strangely familiar startled his ears:

"Gladys! What has happened?" And there, striding to the sofa with the steps of one assured of welcome and thoroughly at home in those strange precincts, came Dr. Quin.

VIII.

It was very late that night—nearly midnight—when the colonel, seated on his veranda and smoking a cigar, caught sight of a cavalry sergeant hurriedly passing his front gate. The main searching-parties had long since come home, unsuccessful; Lieutenant Perry had returned and made report that the people at Dunraven denied having seen or heard anything of Gwynne, that both proprietor and manager had treated his visit as an affront, and that he had had much difficulty in preventing a fracas between his men and a gang of rough fellows employed at the ranch, that finally Mr. Maitland had fallen back in a swoon, and that he had left him to the care of Dr. Quin, who arrived soon after the occurrence. The colonel had been greatly interested and somewhat excited over the details of Perry's adventure as that young gentleman finally gave them, for at first he was apparently averse to saying much about it. Little by little, however, all his conversation with Maitland and Ewen was drawn out, and the particulars of his hostile reception. The colonel agreed with him that there was grave reason to suspect some of the ranch-people of knowing far more of Sergeant Gwynne's disappearance than they would tell; and finally, seeing Perry's indisposition to talk further, and noting his preoccupation and apparent depression of spirits, he concluded that between fatigue and rasped nerves the young fellow would be glad to go to bed: so he said, kindly,—

"Well, I won't keep you, Perry: you're tired out. I'll sit up and see the doctor when he gets back and have a talk with him, then decide what steps we will take in the morning. I'll send a party down the valley at daybreak, anyway. May I offer you some whiskey, or a bottle of beer?"

"Thank you, colonel, I believe not to-night. A bath and a nap will set me all right, and I'll be ready to start out first thing in the morning. Good-night, sir."

But Colonel Brainard could not go to sleep. The garrison had "turned in," all except the guard and Captain Stryker. That officer had returned an hour after dark, and, getting a fresh horse, had started out again, going down the south side of the Monee to search the timber

with lanterns, the Cheyenne scouts having reported that Gwynne's horse had come up that way. He had been missed by Mr. Perry, who galloped up the trail to catch the platoon before it reached the post, and the colonel, now that he had heard the lieutenant's story, was impatiently awaiting his return. Up to within a few minutes of midnight, however, neither Stryker nor the doctor had come; dim lights were burning in both their quarters and at the guard-house. Everywhere else the garrison seemed shrouded in darkness. Catching sight of the yellow chevrons as they flitted through the flood of light that poured from his open door-way, the colonel instantly divined that this must be a sergeant of Stryker's troop going in search of his captain, and promptly hailed him:

"What is it, sergeant? Any news?"

"Yes, sir," answered the soldier, halting short. "Sergeant Gwynne's come back. I was going to the captain's to report."

"How did he get back. Isn't he injured?"

"He says he's had a fall, sir, and has been badly shaken up, but he walked in."

"Why, that's singular! Did he meet none of the searching-parties?—see none of their lights?"

"I can't make out, sir. He's a little queer,—doesn't want to talk, sir. He asked if his horse got in all right, and went and examined the scratches, and seemed troubled about them; but he doesn't say anything."

"Has he gone to the hospital?"

"No, sir: he'll sleep in his usual bunk at the stables to-night. He is only bruised and sore, he says. His face is cut and scratched and bound up in his handkerchief."

"Very well," said the colonel, after a moment's thought. "The captain will look into the matter when he gets back. You take your horse and ride down the south side of the valley and find the Cheyenne scouts. Captain Stryker is with them. Tell him the sergeant is home, safe."

"Very well, sir." And the trooper saluted, faced about, and disappeared in the darkness; while the colonel arose, and, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, began pacing slowly up and down the piazza. He wished Stryker were home; he wished Captain Lawrence were officer of the day, and, so, liable to come out of his quarters again: he had heard just enough about that odd English ranch to make him feel disturbed and ill at ease. There had evidently been hostility between his predecessor and the proprietor of Dunraven, and very probably there had been bad blood between the men of the Eleventh Cavalry and the employees of the ranch: else why should there have been so unprovoked an assault upon the lieutenant this night? Then there were other things that gave him disquiet. Several officers had gathered upon the piazza during the early evening; they were mainly of his own regiment, but Captain Belknap and two of the infantry subalterns were there; Lawrence did not come. Of course the talk was about the incident of the evening, and, later, the rumors about Dunraven. All this was new to the cavalrymen: they had heard, as yet, nothing at all,

and were not a little taken aback by the evident embarrassment and ominous silence of the three infantrymen, when the colonel turned suddenly on Belknap with the question,—

"By the way, captain, I had no time to ask Lawrence, and it really did not occur to me until after he had gone, but—what did he mean by saying that Dr. Quin could tell us something about the people at Dunraven?"

Belknap turned red and looked uncomfortably at his two comrades, as though appealing to them for aid. The younger officers, however, would say nothing at all, and the colonel promptly saw that he had stumbled on some piece of garrison gossip.

"Never mind," he said, with a kindly laugh. "I don't want to drag any stories out by the roots. The doctor can doubtless explain it all in good season."

"Well, Colonel Brainard," answered Belknap, bulkily, "to tell the truth, I really don't know anything about it, and I don't know any one who *does*, though I have heard some woman-talk about the post. The relations between Dr. Quin and some of the officers of the Eleventh were rather strained, and he is a somewhat reserved and secretive man. The stories were set afloat here last fall, and we *had* to hear more or less of them until the Eleventh went away this spring. We know only that Dr. Quin has been to Dunraven and the rest of us haven't. Possibly some of the Eleventh were piqued because they had no such luck, or perhaps their ladies did not like it because Quin wouldn't tell them anything about what he saw. At all events, he refused to talk on the subject at all, and allowed people to draw their own conclusions."

"He probably told his post commander," suggested Lieutenant Farnham, who, as acting adjutant of the post and an aspirant for the adjutancy of the regiment, thought it a good opportunity of putting in a word as indicative of what *he* considered the bounden duty of an officer under like circumstances.

"Well, no, I fancy not," replied Belknap. "About the only thing we really do know is that, in a somewhat angry interview last fall, Colonel Stratton forbade Dr. Quin's leaving the post or going to Dunraven without his express permission. I happened to be in the office at the time."

"Was it before or after that that he was said to go there so often?" asked Farnham.

"Well, both," answered Belknap, reluctantly. "But understand me, Mr. Farnham, I know nothing whatever of the matter."

"I should not suppose that Colonel Stratton would care to restrict his post surgeon from going thither if they needed his professional services," said Colonel Brainard, pleasantly.

"That was the point at issue, apparently," answered Belknap. "Colonel Stratton said that it was *not* on professional grounds that he went, and thereby seemed to widen the breach between them. Dr. Quin would not speak to the colonel after that, except when duty required it."

The conversation changed here, and little more was said; but Colonel

Brainard could not help thinking of a matter that he carefully kept to himself. It was not his custom to require his officers to ask permission to leave the garrison for a ride or hunt when they were to be absent from no duty, and only by day. Here it was midnight, as he thought it over, and the doctor had not returned, neither had he mentioned his desire to ride away, although he had been with the colonel wellnigh an hour before parade. True, he had sent the doctor word to go and join Lieutenant Perry at the gate of Dunraven, and *that* would account for his detention; but he knew that the surgeon was several miles away from his post and his patients at the moment that message was sent.

Meantime, Perry, too, was having a communion with himself and finding it all vexation of spirit. All the way home the memory of that sweet English face was uppermost in his thoughts. He had been startled at the sight of a young and fair woman at Dunraven; he had felt a sense of inexplicable rejoicing when she said to him, "I am Miss Maitland;" it would have jarred him to know that she was wife; he was happy, kneeling by the side of the beautiful girl he had never seen before that very evening, and delighted that he could be of service to her. All this was retrospect worth indulging; but then arose the black shadow on his vision. How came Dr. Quin striding in there as though "native and to the manner born"?—how came he to call her "Gladys"? Perry had been pondering over this matter for full half an hour on the homeward ride before he bethought him of Mrs. Lawrence's remarks about the signal-lights. One thing led to another in his recollection of her talk. The doctor answered the signals,—no one else; the doctor and no one else was received at Dunraven; the doctor had declined to answer any questions about the people at the ranch,—had been silent and mysterious, yet frequent in his visits. And then, more than all, what was that Mrs. Lawrence had said or intimated, that Mrs. Quin, "such a lovely woman, too," had taken her children and left him early that spring, and all on account of somebody or something connected with Dunraven Ranch? Good heavens! It could not be "Gladys." And yet——

Instead of taking a bath and going to bed, Mr. Perry poked his head into Parke's bachelor chamber as he reached the little cottage they shared in common. No Gladys disturbed the junior's dreams, apparently, for he was breathing regularly, sleeping the sleep of the just; and so, finding no one to talk to and being in no mood to go to bed at an hour so comparatively early when he had so much to think about, Perry filled a pipe and perched himself in a big chair by the window-seat, intending to think it all over again. He was beginning to hate that doctor: he would have chafed at the idea of any bachelor's being before him in an acquaintance with Gladys Maitland, but a married man, knowing her so well as to make his wife jealous and himself indifferent to that fact,—knowing her so well as to drive "such a lovely woman, too," into taking her children and quitting the marital roof,—that was too much of a bad thing, and Perry was sore discomfited. He got up, impatient and restless, passed out to the little piazza in front of his quarters, and began pacing up and down, the glow from his corn-

cob pipe making a fiery trail in the darkness. He would have been glad to go back to the colonel and keep watch with him; but there was one thing connected with his visit to Dunraven that he could not bear to speak of, especially as those words of Mrs. Lawrence recurred again and again to his memory. He had not said one word—he did not want to tell—of Gladys Maitland.

And so it happened that Perry, too, was awake and astir when the footsteps of the cavalry sergeant were heard on their way to Captain Stryker's quarters. Listening, he noted that the soldier had halted at the colonel's, held a brief conversation with that officer, and then turned back across the parade. Instantly divining that news had come of Sergeant Gwynne, Perry seized his forage-cap and hurried in pursuit. He overtook the trooper just beyond the guard-house, and went with him eagerly to the stables. A moment more, and he was bending over a soldier's bedside in a little room adjoining the forage-shed and by the light of a dim stable-lantern looking down into the bruised and battered features of the non-commissioned officer whom he had pronounced of all others at Rossiter the most respected and highly thought of by the cavalry garrison.

"Sergeant, I'm very sorry to see you so badly mauled," said Perry. "How on earth did it happen?"

Gwynne turned his head painfully until the one unbandaged eye could look about and see that none of the stable-guard were within hearing, then back again and up into the symphathetic face of his young superior.

"Lieutenant, I must tell you and the captain; and yet it is a matter I profoundly wish to keep as secret as possible,—the story of my day's adventure, I mean."

"You need not tell me at all if you do not wish to," said Perry; "though I think it is due to yourself that the captain should know how it was you were gone all day and that your horse and you both came back in such condition."

"I understand, sir, fully," answered Gwynne, respectfully. "I shall tell the captain the whole story, if he so desire. Meantime, I can only ask that no one else be told. If the men in the troop had an inkling of the true story there would be endless trouble; and so I have tried to account for it by saying my horse and I had an ugly fall while running a coyote through the timber. We did see a coyote, down near the ranch on the Monee, and I did have an ugly fall: I was set upon by three of those ranchmen and badly handled."

"Yes, damn them!" said Perry, excitedly and wrathfully. "I've had an experience with them myself to-night, while we were searching for you."

"So much the more reason, sir, why my mishap should not be told among the men. The two affairs combined would be more than they would stand. There are enough Irishmen here in our troop alone to go down and wipe that ranch out of existence; and I fear trouble as it stands."

"Whether there will be trouble or not will depend very much on the future conduct of the proprietor and manager down there. Of

course we cannot tolerate for an instant the idea of their maintaining a gang of ruffians there who are allowed to assault officers or men who happen to ride around that neighborhood. You were not inside their limits, were you?"

"Yes, sir," said the sergeant, painfully, "I was: I had tied my horse outside and ventured in to get a nearer look at the buildings."

"What time did it happen?"

"This morning, sir; not more than an hour and a half after you spoke to me in the valley."

"Indeed! Then you must have lain there all day! Why, Gwynne, this will never do. I'll go and get the surgeon and have him look you over. You must have been brutally mauled, and must be utterly exhausted."

"Don't go, sir," said the sergeant, eagerly stretching forth a hand. "It—it isn't as you think, sir. I have been kindly cared for. They're not all ruffians down there, and the men who assaulted me will be fully punished. I've been quite as well nursed and fed and brandied and bandaged as though I'd been carried right to hospital. Indeed, I don't need anything but rest. I'll be all right in a day."

"But I think Dr. Quin ought to see you and satisfy us you are not injured."

"Be satisfied, sir. The doctor *has* seen me."

"Why, but how?—where? He was here all day, and only went away at sunset. He joined me at Dunraven about nine o'clock, and hadn't returned when I came in. Did he find you and bring you back?"

Gwynne hesitated painfully again:

"The doctor saw me this evening,—down near where I was hurt; but I got back here without his help, sir. Lieutenant," said the soldier, suddenly, "there are one or two things connected with this day's work that I cannot tell. Come what may, I must not speak of them, even to the captain."

Perry was silent a moment. Then he kindly answered,—

"I do not think any one here will press you to tell what you consider it might be ungrateful or dishonorable in you to reveal. I will do what I can to see that your wishes are respected. And now, if you are sure I can do nothing for you, good-night, sergeant." And the young officer held out his hand.

"Good-night, sir," answered Gwynne. He hesitated one moment. It was the first time since he entered service, nearly five years before, that an officer had offered him his hand. It was a new and strange sensation. It might not be "good discipline" to take advantage of it, but there were other reasons. Gwynne looked up in the frank blue eyes of his lieutenant and read something there that told a new story. Out came a hand as slender and shapely as that of the young officer, and the two were silently and firmly clasped.

"How can I question him?" said Perry to himself as he walked slowly homeward. "Is there not something I am holding back?—something I cannot speak of? By Jupiter! can his be the same reason?"

IX.

At just what hour the post surgeon returned to Fort Rossiter that night no one seemed to know. He was present at sick-call, and imperturbable as ever, on the following morning, and the few officers who were at head-quarters after guard-mounting were able to affirm that the colonel had been courteous as usual in his greeting to the medical officer, and that nothing whatever had been said about his being away so late the previous evening. Captain Stryker came home soon after midnight, had a brief talk with his colonel, and went over to the stables to inquire into Gwynne's condition before he went to bed. Parke came into Perry's room after morning stables, and told him, as he was yawning and stretching in bed, that the captain had had quite a long talk with Gwynne that morning, and that "something was up,"—he didn't know what. Later in the day Perry was sent for by Colonel Brainard, and found the commanding officer in consultation with Captain Stryker and two other troop-commanders. At their request he repeated the story of his adventure at Dunraven, beginning with his instructions to the men he left at the gate, and ending with old Maitland's swooning; and about an hour after he had finished he saw the adjutant with a small escort ride away down the valley, and rightly conjectured that the colonel had sent a letter to Dunraven inquiring into the cause of the assaults on two members of his command. Battalion drill kept him occupied all the morning; a garrison court convened at noon and sat until skirmish drill began at three P.M.; and so it happened that not until near parade did he find a moment's time to himself. He longed to see Mrs. Lawrence and question her as to the nature of the "Dunraven stories" she had mentioned; for what had been a matter of indifference to him then had suddenly become of vivid interest. There were ladies sitting on the Lawrences' gallery, he could plainly see, as the cavalry officers came tramping in from afternoon stables, but he could not hope to ask or hear anything about a matter so near his heart in the presence of so many sympathetic and interested listeners. He kept away towards his own gate, therefore, until he saw that there, leaning on the gate-post, and apparently awaiting him, stood Dr. Quin.

Perry would gladly have avoided the doctor: the antagonism he was beginning to feel for him was of a character that would hardly brook concealment. Cordial and joyous in manner as he was to almost every man, woman, and child he met, it was all the more noticeable that to the very few whom he held in dislike or distrust his bearing was cold and repellent in the last degree. Something told him the doctor was there to speak to him about their chance meeting at Dunraven. He did not want to speak to him at all, just now. Yet how could he hope to have these matters explained without a meeting and a talk? While the other officers strolled over and stopped, most of them, in front of the group of ladies at Lawrence's, Perry stalked straight across the parade and the boundary road, with his blue eyes fixed on the doctor's face.

The latter was studying him as he came, and doubtless read that

expression of coldness and distrust: possibly he resented it. At all events, something prompted him to speak in a tone less cordial than he had ever employed towards Perry,—"a youngster whom I thoroughly approve of," as he said before he had known him a week. Still leaning on the gate-post, and resting his head on his hand, the doctor began:

"Mr. Perry, I have been to see you twice to-day, but could not find you, and I wanted to speak with you on a matter of some importance."

"You could have found me on drill or the court, if anything immediate was needed. I have been nowhere else, except to stables," said Perry, shortly.

"It was a personal matter,—a somewhat embarrassing one,—and I thought best to see you alone."

"Well, here I am, Dr. Quin: drive ahead and let us have it."

"I wanted to ask you if, while you were at the ranch last night, you saw anything of a large signet-ring, with a crest and motto engraved on the stone."

"I did not,—unless you mean the one Mr. Maitland wore."

"The very one! You noticed that, did you?"

"I noticed he had something of the kind on his left hand when he came down."

"And it was nowhere to be found after you went away. You may remember you were chafing and slapping that hand; and I thought you might have accidentally removed it at that time."

"The reflection is not a pleasant one, Dr. Quin," said Perry, with an angry light in the blue eyes.

"Pardon me, Mr. Perry: I put it awkwardly, but I mean no reflection whatever. Miss Maitland mentioned your efforts to restore the old gentleman to consciousness, and together we searched the sofa and the floor after we had put him safely to bed and discovered the loss of the ring. It is one to which he attaches peculiar value, and its loss has preyed upon him. While I know very well you could not have the ring, I was asked to ascertain if you remembered seeing it, and so establish the truth of Mr. Maitland's belief that it was on his finger when he went to that room."

"It was; but I do not recollect its being on his hand after he was carried to the sofa. It would surely have attracted my attention while chafing it."

"The parlor, hall, and piazza have been swept and searched, I am told by this note," and the doctor indicated a little missive he held in his hand, whereat Perry's face did not brighten, "and with no success. I was *asked* to inquire of you, and if it has annoyed you, as I infer by your manner, pray let that be my apology. Then I am to say you saw it when Mr. Maitland entered the room, but not again?"

"Precisely; unless you choose to add to your correspondent that the next time I am associated with missing property at Dunraven I would prefer to be questioned direct, and not through a third party."

A quiet smile shone for an instant on the doctor's grave face:

"I fear that I have not accomplished my mission very diplomatically, Mr. Perry, and am sorry to have vexed you. The colonel tells me, by the way, that I ought to say to you that the reason I was so long

in reaching your party last night was that I was detained attending to another case,—one of our own men. Good-evening, sir." And, raising his forage-cap, the doctor walked slowly and with dignity away, leaving Perry too surprised to speak.

"The colonel told him to tell me!" was Perry's wondering soliloquy at last. "Then I suppose he must have told the chief some story to account for his being away." It was pretty evident from the young fellow's manner as he entered the house that the story was not one which struck him as being entitled to confidence or consideration.

On the table in his little sitting-room lay a dainty note. It was not the first he had received under that superscription, and he had not been slow to open and read them. If anything, the cloud upon his forehead seemed to deepen at sight of it. He picked it up, looked impatiently at the address, hesitated a moment, tossed it back on his desk, and went into the inner room. He would not read it now; it was almost parade-time; he had to bathe and change his dress, for after parade he was to dine at the quarters of an infantry friend, and Captain and Mrs. Lawrence were to be of the party. Already it was noted that when any of the few infantry people at the post gave a little tea or dinner at which only eight or ten were gathered together, the Belknaps were not invited on the same evening with Mr. Perry, and *vice versâ*. When Parke came in, whistling and singing and banging doors and making all manner of uncouth noise in the exuberance of his boyish spirits, he bolted into Perry's domain, as was his wont, and began a rattling comment on the events of the day.

"By the way," he broke in, suddenly, "we can't both go to-morrow; and I suppose you want to."

"Go where?"

"Why, out with the hounds: to-morrow's the day, you know."

Perry gave a whistle of perplexity. The colonel had promised the ladies that there should be a big run this very week. All the fleet hounds of the cavalry battalion were to be out, and all the officers who could be spared from the day's duties: a detachment was to go over into the valley of a stream some ten miles away, pitch tents in the shade, and there set luncheon for the entire party; horses were to be provided for all the ladies who cared to go mounted, buggies and "buckboards" were to convey the others, and it was to be a gala occasion. Antelope, coyote, or jack-rabbit,—any four-footed game the prairie afforded was to be "coursed" in due state and ceremony; the ladies "in at the death" were to be crowned and subsequently presented with trophies of the chase more sightly than the mask or brush *au naturel*. The affair had been gayly talked over that very evening of the colonel's dinner, but the events of the previous day and the perplexities of the one just closing had completely driven it all out of his head.

And yet he was engaged to ride with Mrs. Belknap,—the Amazon of Fort Rossiter! and for the first time in his life Ned Perry would have been glad of an excuse to get away from a gallop with an accomplished *équestrienne*.

"You don't mean to say you had forgotten it?" asked Parke, in amaze.

"Don't blow on me, there's a good fellow; but, after all my 'breaks' of yesterday,—getting an absent from drill and into a row at the ranch,—I declare it had slipped my memory. No, you go, Parke: I don't deserve to be let off anything, after yesterday. You've been sticking to duty like a brick ever since you joined, and Stryker ought to give you the preference."

"But you're engaged to ride with Mrs. Belknap," said Parke.

"Who told you so?"

"I heard her say so. Dana asked if he might have the pleasure, just a while ago, and she smilingly replied that it would have been delightful, but that you had asked her four days ago, when it was first planned."

"So I had; but I've been getting into scrapes ever since, and I oughtn't to go. By Jove! I'll write her a note now and say I can't get off. It's true enough. I wouldn't let such a fellow go if I commanded the troop. I'd make him stay in and attend roll-call a week."

"Well, Mrs. Belknap expects you," said Parke, dubiously. "Not but what Dana would be glad to take your place. Belknap can't go: he's too bulky to ride, and she'd leave him miles astern first run we had, sure."

Suddenly Perry bethought him of the note, and made a dive into the sitting-room, towel in hand and shirt-sleeves rolled to the elbows. It read,—

"Mon Ami,—

"You go to the Sprague's' to dine this evening, and there will be cards, and you will not be able to get away until very late. Will you not come in a little while before parade,—without fail? There is something I greatly want to see you about.

"Sincerely,

"F. E. B.

"Come early as possible after stables."

"Thunder and turf!" exclaimed Perry; "and there goes first call now! Here, Parke, you're dressed; run over and tell Mrs. Belknap I just this instant read her note and I can't come: I'll get a late as it is."

"How can I, man?" shouted Parke, as he fled. "I've got to get into war-paint too.—Lucky thing for me," he added, in lower tone. "I don't want to be the one to tell the prettiest woman at Rossiter that her note that she sent here at noon wasn't opened until first call for parade."

Perry's dressing was completed at racing speed, but even then he was buckling his sabre-belt as the assembly sounded, and he had to go straight across to where his troop was forming,—a glittering rank of yellow plumes,—and so could only give a hurried sidelong glance towards Belknap's quarters. There was her bonnie ladyship pacing up and down the veranda; and he knew well he would have to account for his sins. All through parade his thoughts were divided between the fair face he had seen at Dunraven the night before and the dark one with the long, curving lashes sweeping those soft, peachy cheeks

and half veiling those wonderful, liquid, speaking, side-glancing eyes. He saw Mrs. Belknap stroll forth a moment as though to join the group of ladies on the walk, then return to her slow, graceful, languid promenade up and down her piazza. He knew that he must hasten to her the instant the rank of officers dispersed and make his peace if possible, but as they marched to the front and saluted the commanding officer he signalled that he had something to say to them all, and, moving away to the edge of the parade-ground, so that the troops might not be detained on the line, he gathered his officers about him, a silent group under the little shade-trees that bounded the road-way, and took a letter from the breast of his uniform coat.

"Gentlemen," said he, "this will be of importance to some of you, and of interest to all. It explains something none of us understood, and contains matter that I deem it best you all should hear. It is a letter from the manager of Dunraven Ranch.—Mr. Adjutant, you read it."

And, clearing his throat, Mr. Farnham began:

"DUNRAVEN RANCH,
"Friday.

"COLONEL BRAINARD, —th Cavalry, Fort Rossiter:

"DEAR SIR,—Mr. Maitland is confined to his bed, and too ill to personally reply to your letter of this morning, which was duly received at the hands of your adjutant. He directs me to write as follows: that, while he regrets the boisterous conduct of some of his employees last evening and their assault on Mr. Perry, he considers that in view of the results—a broken head on the part of one of our people and no apparent damage to Mr. Perry—the matter should not be pressed. As to the other assault alluded to, he has no knowledge of it whatever, and can find no man who has.

"The distinct understanding between Mr. Maitland and the former commanding officer at Fort Rossiter was that none of the garrison should ever pass within our lines; and we agreed on the other hand that none of our people should ever trespass on the reservation. Mr. Maitland holds that it was the duty of Colonel Brainard's predecessor to acquaint him with the terms of this agreement, and the residents at Dunraven had no means of knowing that the invaders of last evening were not the very men whom the proper authorities had pledged themselves to restrain from such aggression.

"Mr. Maitland begs that Colonel Brainard will in future ratify and conform with the agreement formally entered into by his predecessor.

"Respectfully,
"P. EWEN, *Manager.*"

There was a moment of puzzled silence. The colonel looked quizzically around upon the circle of bronzed and soldierly faces under the black helmets. Captain Stryker's lips were twitching with amusement behind their black fringe of beard. No one spoke at first; but presently a deep-voiced troop-commander gave vent to his emotions:

"What a bombastic old crank! Who is he?"

"An Englishman,—the owner of the biggest ranch in this part of Texas," answered the colonel. "Captain Belknap, Captain Lawrence, have you any knowledge of the agreement of which he speaks?"

"Nothing beyond the vague talk we heard. Dr. Quin would be more apt to know what Colonel Stratton agreed to than we would," answered Belknap.

"I will ask the doctor this evening. Meantime, knowing no reason why such a policy of non-intercourse should be observed, I shall not recognize it. What is more, while you will caution your men to respect Dunraven bounds as they would other private property, let them show no hostility to the ranch-people who may have occasion to visit us. The man who brought this note tells me he was threatened and abused by some cavalrymen near the stables. Mr. Maitland professes to have no knowledge of another assault; but we have evidence that Sergeant Gwynne was beaten by three fellows on the Dunraven grounds yesterday. That matter is yet to be settled. Now one thing more: troop and company commanders will closely watch their men the next few nights,—keep a sharp lookout on the quarters until midnight, to see that no men slip away; after midnight the guard must attend to it. There is an element in the ranks that would be only too glad to go down to Dunraven some night and have satisfaction on their own account for yesterday's affairs. This must *not* be permitted. See to it, gentlemen. That is all for the present.—Mr. Perry, will you come with me a moment?"

Perry went. Mrs. Belknap saw him go, and believed herself slighted.

X.

The hounds were out, and all Fort Rossiter "society" was with them. The day was faultless,—neither too warm nor too cloudy; a brisk westerly breeze sent the cloud-shadows sailing steadily across the broad prairie sea and keeping the veils and skirts of the Amazons of the party a-flutter. Three there were of these, the rest of the sisterhood preferring to follow the hunt by buggy or buck-board, though frankly expressing their envy of the fortunate riders. Mounted on her own spirited little bay, admirably fitted as to habit, and sitting squarely and well, Mrs. Belknap would have been the centre of observation of all the cavalry officers even had she not been, as she incontestably was, the beauty of the garrison. The colonel had offered Mrs. Lawrence one of his own horses, and therefore was accorded the right of being her escort. Mrs. Sprague was similarly indebted for her "mount" to Captain Stryker; and a very bright and beaming little body she was as she rode over the springy turf at the side of the dark-haired troop-leader. She dearly loved fresh air, sunshine, space, healthful exercise of every kind, was the champion at tennis and an indomitable walker, but a ride was something better than all, and of course the rarest pleasure. The wife of a faithful and honest old subaltern who had reaped his four "fogies" for twenty years' service and was still looking forward to his captaincy, her opportunities for riding had been limited to those occasions when some thoughtful cavalryman would

send his horse around with his compliments and an invitation to take a canter. The Eleventh were very busy during their stay at Rossiter, or very chary of their horseflesh. They never rode, said the infantry people, in speaking of them to their successors, while the —th were not only themselves in saddle hours each day, but they were constantly sending horses to the ladies; and—wonder of wonders!—*all* the infantry officers were invited to join in the hunt, and such as could go were provided with excellent mounts. And so it happened that a large and merry party had taken the field: the colonel with a dozen of his officers,—cavalry and infantry,—the ladies, the sergeant in charge of the hounds, with his two or three assistants, and the brace of orderlies, made a "field" that covered a goodly front as in dispersed order, chatting and laughing, they swept out eastward from the post, following in the wake of the master of the hounds and his long, lithe, fleet-limbed coursers themselves. Beautiful creatures were these hounds of the —th,—many of them black as jet, others a slaty blue, others a quakerish drab, but all with huge rounded chests, powerful shoulders and haunches, and wonderful limbs for speed. There were nearly two dozen of them, springily trotting along behind their huntsman, with lolling tongues and drooping head and tail. Yet eyes and ears were eager and alert, watching, waiting for the signal from anywhere along the extended front that should start them in a race that would leave the very gale behind. They are the coursers, the runners, the aristocrats of the chase, disdainful of the work being done by their humbler kindred,—the canine skirmishers who are bounding, bustling, scurrying, sniffing, scampering everywhere over the prairie to their front,—yet keenly observant of the results. All manner of dog—even volunteer whelp from the Cheyenne camp—is to be seen along that outer line,—spaniels, a lordly Newfoundland, all varieties of terrier and "curs of low degree," all, even an occasional bird-dog, scouting the prairie in desperate eagerness to snap and seize a rabbit or throttle a coyote, for down in their jealous hearts they well know that, once started, the quarry leaps for the far horizon, vanishes from their view like the "Split-the-Wind" of tradition, and leaves them, despite heroic effort, far, far behind, while the lithe-limbed greyhounds and the racers of the garrison horses alone can keep in sight of the chase.

"Hard lines on Perry, isn't it?" said Mr. Graham, as he trotted up beside Mrs. Belknap and took his place for the moment with her bevy of cavaliers. "First time he ever missed a hunt, I reckon."

"He needn't have missed this one," said Parke. "It was my week, and I told him to go; and Captain Stryker said so, too; but——"

Here Mr. Parke broke off suddenly and looked in mild wonderment in Dana's face, for that young gentleman had managed, unseen by Mrs. Belknap, to swing free his right foot and give the speaker's left a vehement kick. Too late, however. Mrs. Belknap had heard it.

"Are you cavalrymen *all* so little to be trusted?" she asked, with a brilliant smile upon her flushing face. Exercise and excitement had lent unusual sparkle to her eyes and color to her cheeks—"she is positively beautiful to-day," as Mrs. Lawrence confessed to the colonel at the moment.

"I had a note from Mr. Perry this morning saying he was grievously disappointed, but that some troop-duty had been assigned to him which could not be transferred and he must stay and finish it."

"What he said is true, Mrs. Belknap," promptly asseverated Mr. Dana. "The papers have all to be in readiness for muster on Monday, and the saddle-kits put in shape for inspection."

"*Only* in Captain Stryker's troop?" softly inquired the lady, with eyelids rising incredulously.

"No, of course not. One officer is back at the post from each troop. It happened to fall on Perry in his."

"I fancy I should prefer serving in some older captain's troop if I were Mr. Perry. It seems that while your other captains stay home and look after their companies, Captain Stryker has a subaltern attend to his while *he* comes a-hunting."

"On the other hand, we fellows have a dozen things to do in *our* troops that Captain Stryker does himself in his. It's as broad as it's long, Mrs. Belknap," said Dana. He did not fancy her criticising the methods of his cavalry associates, and was possibly a little piqued at the decided annoyance she showed at Perry's failure to attend. Meantime, Stryker, all unconscious of her censure, was chatting laughingly with Mrs. Sprague and exchanging shots with the colonel and Mrs. Lawrence. The four were getting on admirably together, and seemed too much absorbed in their own fun to note the fact that Mrs. Belknap and her knot of four or five satellites had been gradually edging away towards the right, and that the rest of the hunt was becoming widely scattered.

"It is time we stirred up a jack-rabbit at least," said the colonel. "Suppose we veer over towards the northeast a little. Whatever we do, we want no chase down there towards Dunraven: those wire fences would spoil it all."

"I wonder if those people never hunt?" said Mr. Farnham, who had joined the quartette: he always kept close to his colonel, as befitted an aspirant for the adjutancy. "Englishmen are generally game for all manner of sport."

"I can see horsemen out there on the prairie to the east of the ranch," said Stryker, whose eyes were keen, "and I could have sworn a moment ago that I saw a horsewoman."

"Nonsense, Captain Stryker!" exclaimed Mrs. Lawrence, yet with quick glance at Mrs. Sprague. "What *could* you have taken for a 'lady on a horseback'? Do you suppose there could be ladies at Dunraven and we not know it?"

"Hardly possible," answered the captain; "and therefore I doubted the evidence of my senses. Yet something very like a lady followed by a groom rode down the slope into the valley about ten minutes ago. She is out of sight in the timber now. If Perry were only with us I'd send him off there to see."

"Yes, we miss Perry on our hunts," said the colonel to his lady friends. "He is one of our best riders and most enthusiastic sportsmen. He *will* be out, will he not, Stryker?"

"Yes, sir. There is really no necessity for his staying in, and I so

told him; but he felt that he ought to, at least until certain work was finished. Then he said he could ride eastward and join us. Hurrah! there they go!"

Far out to the front, straight to the east, "a gray streak with a white tip to it" went shooting into space as though launched from some invisible bow drawn by giant power. A big jack-rabbit, all legs and ears, had listened quivering and trembling to the sounds of the approaching hunt, until an enterprising terrier, foremost skirmisher of the line, fairly tumbled over him as he crouched behind a little bunch of weeds: then with one mighty leap and the accompaniment of a wild yelp from his discoverer he sprang forth into a race for his precious life. "Hoy! hoy!" yells the sergeant as he sights the quarry. "Hurrah!" shout the nearest huntsmen, and, with one simultaneous impulse, skirmishing curs, stealthy, springing hounds, eager steeds, and jubilant riders,—men and women,—away goes the entire field sweeping in pursuit. At first all is one mad rush until it is certain that the rabbit is a veteran who understands well the maxim that "a stern-chase is a long chase" all the world over. Let him keep it well in mind, fix his eyes on that one distant, shadowy butte on the eastern horizon, and bear away for that, straight as the flight of laden honey-bee, and his chance for life is fair: he has fifty yards the start of the nearest hound. Let him swerve or hesitate, and, like the original of the famous comparison, he is lost. The prairie is level as a floor, the turf firm and springy: not a prairie-dog has mined the sod or digged a pit for the unwary. "Magnificent ground!—couldn't have better!" shouts the colonel to Mrs. Lawrence, who is somewhat nervously tugging at her reins and leaning back in the saddle. "Let him go. There isn't a possibility of a stumble. Look at Mrs. Belknap!" he adds. He would not do so ordinarily, but he and his fair partner are being left hopelessly behind in the race, and, though his big charger rarely lands him among the foremost and the colonel does not attempt to vie with the light riders among the youngsters, he cannot bear "dragging." Mrs. Lawrence gives one glance in the indicated direction, sees Mrs. Belknap skimming like a bird across the grassy level, riding from the right front diagonally towards the frantic chase. Gentle as she is and unenvious of her rival's superiority in some respects, she *won't* be thought a coward. The color deepens on her cheek, her soft eyes flash, she bites her pretty red lips, and, to Lawrence's amaze, her riding-whip comes viciously down upon her courser's flank and her little hands give rein. Away she flies, out to the front, leaving her lord and master and his friend, her escort the colonel, thundering bulkily in her track, but losing ground with every stride. Delighted to have so light a rider, the colonel's second horse makes play for the very leaders. Here, close behind the master of the hounds, all eyes fixed on that bounding tuft of gray and white a few score yards ahead, bending over their horses' necks and keeping just enough pressure on the bit to prevent overriding the huntsman, ride Parke and Graham, two "light weights," who have coursed many a mile of prairie. Just behind them, a little to their right, rides Mrs. Belknap, her veil fluttering straight out behind, her glorious eyes flashing, her dark skin flushed with triumph

and the exhilaration of the dashing pace, her little hands wound about in the reins she holds so firmly. Splendidly she sits her fleet racer, and Dana has to urge and spur his clumsier troop-horse to keep in close attendance. These four are well in advance of all the others. Back of them, gallantly urging on her sturdy sorrel, comes Mrs. Sprague, with Stryker riding warily alongside and watching her "going" before he will satisfy himself that it is safe to trust her to her own guiding. Level as the prairie is here, he knows that a mile or so ahead there are "breaks" leading down into the valley of one of the innumerable tributaries of the Washita. *Then* the story may be different. He looks up in surprise at the thunder of hoofs close alongside, and Mrs. Lawrence, with excitement in her eyes, overtakes, then passes them on her way to the front. "See!" he points to his partner,—"see that dark shadow across the prairie out there. We cannot ride at this pace when we pass that hollow: the breaks set in still farther." He glances over his shoulder and signals to the nearest officer to follow Mrs. Lawrence and look out for her, and the gallant does his best, but all are at top speed; the colonel and the heavy weights—infantry and cavalry—are beginning to lose ground, and still that gray "puff-ball" far to the front seems inch by inch to be slipping away from his pursuers; still the long, lean greyhounds, looking almost flat against the sward in their wonderful strides, speed on in relentless chase, eager muzzles outstretched, eager eyes glaring on the bounding quarry, gleaming muscles working in the sunshine like the steel rods of the drivers of the "lightning express." A dozen of them are bunched in the track of the chase; others are farther out to right and left. Not an inch do the pursuers seem to have gained: straight as an arrow has been the flight so far, but now the "breaks" are just ahead, little ravines cut in here and there across the level. Will he keep his determined course, up hill and down, straight away to the east, or will he lose heart, tack, veer, double and twist? If he swerve he is a lost rabbit!

Far to the rear, yelping, panting, distracted by this time, the terriers and mongrels, the original leaders, have fallen. The field, too, is strung out nearly a mile deep at the end of the first six minutes' run, for some of the laggards have given up and are disposed to wait for the coming of the buggies and buck-boards. Here at the front all is tense excitement. All eyes are on the rabbit, for now or never will the crisis come. The horses are breathing heavily, but with no thought of slackening speed. "Watch him now as he sights that *arroyo!*" shouts Graham to Parke, for far out to the right front a ravine bursts off to the southeast, and one of its shallow contributors stretches obliquely across the rabbit's frenzied vision. "Veer that way; he'll take it, sure!" shouts the huntsman; and, sure enough, no sooner does he reach it than the gray victim darts down the winding shelter, as though hopeful that his sudden twist would throw his pursuers off the sight; scent the greyhound has none. The move is disastrous; "Hi!" shout the leading riders, waving the pursuit to the right front, and, obedient to signal, the foremost hounds sweep in long curve into the *coulée*, striking it many a yard farther down than where the harried chase first dived into its treacherous shadows. And now those hounds who were out on the

right flank are up in line with the very leaders, and bounding along the level at the side of the ravine, yet keeping wary eye upon the chase. So, too, the horsemen. Making a deep curve in the ravine five hundred yards ahead, and confident that Bunny will blindly rush along his winding track, they strike out across the prairie, gaining twenty horse-lengths by the move; and now, with two or three of the oldest hounds, Parke, Dana, and Mrs. Belknap are darting on abreast of the chase. "Keep out there to the left, some of you!" shouts Dana. "He'll spring up the other side quick as he sees us. Drive him back." And, obedient to the signal of his waving hand, two of the leading troopers breast the slopes to the east, calling half a dozen hounds with them. Darting around a bend, Bunny's agonized eyes catch sight of the hounds and horses on the right bank, and like a flash he whirls, scampers up the opposite slope, and shoots out on the prairie again just in time to meet the hounds and troopers who have anticipated the move. Now he is wild and demoralized. Once more he dives into the ravine and sends the dust flying into the very faces of his pursuers, for now the leading hounds are so close that the foremost jaws are snapping the air at his every bound. A quick turn to the right and up the slope throws these leaders far—*too* far—beyond; they sweep around in long curve; but, though he has thrown them off, the hunted, senseless, helpless wretch has forgotten the trailers to the rear; they spring across the angle he has made, and are close as the original pursuers, and much the fresher. Wildly, madly now he twists and turns, first up one bank, then the other. Far to the rear the coming riders see the signs of his breaking down, mark the scurrying to and fro of horse and hound. "Come on!" they shout. "He's gone now, and we can be in at the death!" Mrs. Lawrence on one side of the ravine is as far to the front as Mrs. Belknap on the other. *One* of them *must* lose the brush: he cannot die on both sides at once. The dark beauty has had more than one rasping disappointment in the last two days: it would be intolerable now that, after all, Mrs. Lawrence, and not she, should prove the victor. Bunny makes one frantic rush up the slope to the right, and, with half a dozen hounds at his very heels, spins in front of her eyes, catches sight of two fresh antagonists confronting him, whirls suddenly about to the right, and almost dives under her horse's heaving barrel as he once more plunges into the ravine, down the rugged slope, up the gentle ascent to the other side. There half a dozen long, lean muzzles gleam close behind him; he falters, wavers; a sharp nose is thrust underneath him as he runs, a quick toss sends him kicking, struggling into air, and in another instant, with piteous but ineffectual squeak and pleading, he is the centre of a tumbling, snapping, fang-gnashing group of hounds, and his little life is torn out almost before Graham can leap from his saddle, beat them back with the visor of his cap, then, seizing the still quivering body by the legs that would have saved could that empty head only have directed, holds poor Bunny aloft in front of Mrs. Lawrence's snorting steed and proclaims her "Queen of the Chase."

And this, too, has Mrs. Belknap to see and strive to smile; while down in her heart she knows that it could not so have happened had Perry come.

XI.

Riding eastward just before noon, somewhat comforted in conscience because of his self-denial of the morning, Ned Perry scanned the distant prairie in search of the hunt. It was nearly luncheon-time, and he expected to find the party making its way to the little stream whither the baskets, boxes, and hampers had been despatched by wagon some hours before; but when he sighted the quartermaster driving homeward in his buggy he learned from that bulky veteran that rabbit after rabbit had been run, and that the whole party had finally decided to give dogs and horses a cool drink down in the Monee valley before starting northward across the prairie. "They must be getting down into the valley two or three miles east of the ranch just about now, and will go due north from there, unless they stir up more game along the Monee. If I were you," said the quartermaster, "I'd ride over to the lunch-stand. You won't get there much before the crowd."

Perry thanked him for the information, but, so far from accepting his advice, the younger officer turned his horse's head in the direction of Dunraven, and was speedily riding thither with an alacrity that he himself could hardly explain.

In his brief talk with the colonel after parade on the previous evening Perry had told him what he could of the characteristics of Messrs. Maitland and Ewen. The odd letter which had been sent by them had given the commanding officer cause for much thought, and he was desirous, evidently, of gathering from Perry's observations as complete an idea as was possible of their life and surroundings. And still Perry had found it impossible to volunteer any description of Miss Maitland; he could not bear to speak of her until—until he knew more of the doctor's purpose in his visits to the ranch. He had been detained by his commander just long enough to make it necessary for him to go direct to the Spragues' without leaving his helmet and sabre at home. They were waiting dinner for him as it was, but Mrs. Belknap took no note of that circumstance: what she saw was that he had avoided even passing within hail of her piazza both before and after parade.

Now, though conscious of no intention of avoidance, Perry rode forth to the meeting of this day with some little misgiving. In the first place, he knew that he must strive to make his peace with this slighted lady; and yet, in view of all he had seen and heard in the past forty-eight hours, how utterly dwarfed had that affair—his laughing flirtation with Mrs. Belknap—become! Had any one told him his attentions to her and her marked preference for his society were matters that people were beginning to talk of,—some with sly enjoyment, others with genuine regret,—he would have been grateful for the information, instead of resentful, as, with most men, would be the case ninety-nine times out of a hundred. But he knew nothing of this, and had too little experience to suspect the comments in circulation. She was most interesting—up to the day before yesterday; he loved to ride or dance with her; he enjoyed a chat with her more than he

could tell. A most sympathetic and attentive listener was Mrs. Belknap, and her voice was low and sweet and full of subtly caressing tones. She had made him talk to her by the hour of his home, his hopes and ambitions, his profession and his prospects, and had held him in a silken bondage that he had no desire to escape.

And yet, as he rode out on the breezy plain this brilliant day, he found all thought of her distasteful, and his eyes, far from searching for the flutter of her trim habit in the distant riding-party, *would* go a-roaming over the intervening shades and shallows down in the Monee valley and seek the bare, brown walls of Dunraven far across the stream. It was odd indeed that he should have sought this, the longest way round, on his ride in quest of his companions from the fort.

Once again he looked at the isolated clump of buildings from his post of observation on the bluff; once again he saw across the stream and through the trees the barbed barrier that had caused both him and his men such laceration of flesh and temper; once again he saw the shallow valley winding away to the southeast, decked with its scrubby fringe-work of cottonwood and willow; but this time, three miles away its accustomed solitude was broken by groups of riders and darting black specks of dogs, all moving northward once more and already breasting the slopes. He should have turned away eastward and ridden across country to join them, but down here in the valley, only a short distance away, absorbed in watching the hunting-party, sat Mr. Ewen on a pawing and excited bay. Whatever coolness his rider might feel at this discovery, it was not shared by Nolan: he pricked up his ears and hailed his fellow-quadruped with cordial and unaffected pleasure, a neigh that the English-bred horse was so utterly uninsular as to whirl about and answer with corresponding warmth. Ewen caught at his heavy Derby and jerked it off his bullet head with an air of mingled embarrassment and civility, replacing it with similarly spasmodic haste. Perry coolly, but with a certain easy grace, raised his forage-cap in response to the salutation, and then, seeing the manager still looking at him as though he wanted to say something and did not know how to begin, gave Nolan his head and rode down to short hailing-distance.

"We meet on neutral ground out here, Mr. Ewen. I suppose your exclusive employer over yonder can hardly prohibit your answering civil inquiries after his health?" And, though he meant to be distant, Perry found himself smiling at the oddity of the situation.

"Do you know, I was just thinking about you," answered Ewen, "and wondering whether you were with that party down yonder? The old gentleman is better, thanks. He had two pretty bad nights, but is coming around slowly."

"And Miss Maitland,—how is she?"

"Rather seedy. She has had a good deal of care and vexation of late, I fancy, and this is no place for a young girl, anyhow."

"Well, you have some appreciation of the true character of Dunraven as a residence, after all!" answered Perry. "Now, if you can give me any good reason why she should live in this utterly out-of-the-way place, you will lift a weight from my mind."

"Oh, they don't live here, you know," spoke Ewen, hurriedly. "She comes here only when her father does. It is her own doing. She goes with him everywhere, and will not leave him. She's all he has, don't you know?"

"I don't know anything about it. You Dunraven people seem averse to any expression of interest or courtesy from your fellow-men, but I'm free to say I should like to know what on earth there is in American cavalrymen to make them such objects of aversion to your master; and I would be glad to know how it is such a girl as that is dragged into such a hole as yonder."

Ewen sat in silence a moment, studying the young fellow's face.

"You deserve a better welcome there," he presently answered, "and I don't know that I can do better than to tell you the truth,—what I know of it. And let me tell you that if the old man knew of my speaking of it to any one, I'd lose the most lucrative but least attractive place I ever had. Do you see?"

"Then perhaps you had better not tell me. I do not care to pry into secrets."

"Oh, this is no secret. It was *that* that drove him here: everybody knew it in England. You were mighty shabbily treated at the ranch, and you requited it by preventing what would have been a bloody row and by lending us a helping hand. Even the old man recognizes that; and I think he'd be glad to say so to you, and see you, if you were not just what you are,—a cavalry officer."

"Why, what on earth can we have done? If any of our cloth have wronged Mr. Maitland in any way, it is our right to know it and take it up."

"It wasn't *your* cloth, old fellow," said Ewen, thawing visibly, "but it was the cavalry all the same that broke his heart and his pride, and made his life the wreck it is, and drove him from his home, shunning the sight of his fellow-men, all these years,—exiling *her*, too, in the prime of her young life. Mr. Perry, there are only three or four of us at Dunraven who know the story, but *we* have only sympathy and pity—no blame—for him, though he is the harshest master I ever served."

"How did it happen?" asked Perry.

"All through his son. There had been more of them, but there was only the one—Archie—when the Lancers were ordered to South Africa. He was a youngster, only seventeen, they tell me, and he had just been gazetted to his cornetcy. The old man was all wrapped up in him, for of the three boys the eldest had died only the month before the regiment was ordered on foreign service and the second had been killed in India. Both these two who were gone had made themselves famous among their comrades by their fearlessness and high character, and the old man, of course, could not ask Archie to quit the service just when orders for dangerous duty came. The boy went to the Cape with his corps, and got into the thick of the Zulu war just at the time of the massacre of the 24th at Isandlwhana and the fight at Rorke's Drift. I was at home then, and all England was quivering with grief over such needless sacrifice as was made of that regiment, and all ready

to fall down and worship such fellows as Chard and Bromhead, who made the superb fight almost at the same time. They say old Maitland wanted to go himself, as volunteer or something, with Lord Chelmsford, but it couldn't be done. *His* father had fought at Alma and Inkerman, and his grandfather had led the Guards at Waterloo. The whole tribe were soldiers, you know; and now Archie was with the Lancers in Zululand, and the Lancers were going to wipe out the disasters of the first fights of the campaign, and Archie was to uphold the grand old fighting name and come home covered with glory. He was the heir now, and Miss Gladys was but a little girl. I have heard it all from Mrs. Cowan: she was their housekeeper in those days, and a sort of companion, too, to Mrs. Maitland, who was very delicate. The old man was very fiery and proud, and full of fierce denunciation of everything that had gone wrong in the campaign; and he offended some people by the way he condemned some officer who was a friend of theirs, and there were others who thought he talked too much; but he fairly boiled over when the news came of how the Prince Imperial had been abandoned by his escort, and that a British officer and a dozen men had run two miles at top speed from a beggarly little squad of niggers before they dared look round to see what had become of their prince, whom they had left to fight the gang alone. That was old Maitland's text for a month. If any son of his had ever been of that party he would disown, disgrace, deny him, forbid him his sight, cut him off forever. And right in the midst of it all—a judgment, some people said—there came the awful news that Cornet Maitland of the Lancers was to be court-martialled for misbehavior in face of the enemy. Of course the old man only raged at first,—said it couldn't be true,—'twas all some foul invention or ridiculous blunder; but he ran up to London and saw somebody at the Horse-Guards,—that's our War Office, you know,—and came back looking a century older and simply crushed to earth. Mrs. Cowan says they showed him the official report of a general officer who was called upon to explain why he had not sent certain troops to the relief of an advanced and threatened post, and he replied that he had sent the order by Cornet Maitland of the Lancers, had given him an escort of a dozen men and strict injunctions to push through by night, at all hazards, though the way was beset with Zulus, and that he neither went through nor returned, but was found hiding at a kraal two days after, only twenty miles away. The escort returned, and after much cross-examination had told the story, separately and collectively, that the young officer had become utterly unnerved towards midnight by the reports from scouting-parties and others, had declared to them that it was simply madness to attempt to push through,—they would be massacred to a man,—and, though they announced that they were stanch and ready, he refused, and ordered them to bivouac where they were for the night; and in the morning he had disappeared. They declared they supposed he had gone back to camp, and, after waiting a day, they returned, reporting him lost. When found at the kraal he was delirious with fever, or pretended to be, said the general, and he was brought in under arrest, and the trial was to proceed. I don't know how it turned

out. He was not court-martialled, but permitted to return to England. It was said he told a very different story,—that he had begged the brigade major who detailed the escort to let him have half a dozen of his own Lancers instead of the pack of irregulars they gave him; he did not trust them, and feared they would abandon him as they had the Prince; but the staff-officer said the order couldn't be changed,—these men knew the country, and all that sort of thing, you know; and there was one fellow in the Lancers who stuck to it that he believed Maitland had tried his best to get through alone. But 'twas all useless: somebody had to be held responsible, and the failure was all heaped on him. Meantime, there had been fury at home; old Maitland had written casting him off, repudiating,—cursing him, for all I know,—and the next thing there came a messenger from the captain of his ship at Southampton. They brought his watch, his ring, his sword and portmanteaus, and a letter which was written on receipt of that his father sent him,—a long letter, that the old man never read to any living soul, but broods over to this day. The young fellow bade them all good-by; he would not live to disgrace them further, if that was what was thought of him at home, and leaped overboard from the steamer the night after she weighed anchor,—no one aboard could tell just when, but he was writing in his state-room as she cleared the harbor, and the steward saw him undressing at nine o'clock. In the morning everything about his belongings was found in perfect order,—his letter to the captain of the ship, the portmanteaus, watch, ring, clothing, etc., just as he described in that letter,—and he was no more seen. It was the conviction of all that he must have leaped overboard in the darkness when far out at sea.

"Then Mrs. Maitland bowed her head and never lifted it again. Then, all alone, and fiercely rejecting anything like sympathy, old Maitland took to travel,—came here to America, wandered around the world, shunning men as he would these prairie-wolves; and when he had to go to England he would see no one but the attorneys and solicitors with whom he had business. Here at Dunraven he is more content than anywhere, because he is farther from the world. Here Gladys is queen: 'twas she who named it, two years ago, for her mother was a connection of the earl's. But Maitland even here hates to have his name mentioned; and that is why I say he refers all business to me and keeps himself out of everything. Do you see what a weight he carries?"

Mr. Ewen had grown red with the intensity and rapidity of his talk. He removed his hat and mopped his face and brow with a big silk handkerchief, and then glanced again at Perry, who had listened with absorbed interest and who was now silently thinking it over, looking curiously at Ewen the while.

"Have I bored you half to death?" asked the Englishman, somewhat ruefully. "I never told that story before, but it has been smouldering for years."

"*Bored?* No! I never was more interested in my life. I was thinking what a different sort of fellow you were from the man I met out yonder the other day. Did they never do anything to clear the

matter up? In our country it never would have been allowed to rest there."

"It was too far gone; and when the boy killed himself the thing was used by all the government papers—you'd call them 'administration organs'—as a confession of judgment. When the Lancers came home there was some talk, but it was soon hushed. Maitland had shut up the old place by that time and gone no one knew where, but I read it in one of the London papers,—*Truth*, I think,—a story that two of the irregulars had quarrelled with their fellows and after the war was over told a tale that made a sensation in Cape Colony. They said that the young officer was a maligned man; that up to midnight he had pushed on, but every scout and patrol they met warned them that thousands of Zulus were ahead, and that it was madness to try. The men began whispering among themselves, and begged the sergeant to attempt to dissuade the Lancer officer; and he did, and they all began to talk, but he refused to listen. At last they halted at a little stream and flatly refused to go a step farther. He ordered, begged, and implored. He promised heavy reward to any one of their number who would come and show him the way. Then they heard the night cries or signals of some war-parties across the fields, and the sergeant and most of the men put spurs to their horses; the others followed, and they rode back five miles until they were within our patrolled lines; then they bivouacked, supposing of course the Lancer had followed them. But he hadn't: he never joined them all next day, and likely as not he had done his best to get through that strange country by night, alone, and had tried to carry his despatches to the detachment. They knew they must tell a straight story or be severely punished. They were twelve against one when it came to evidence, as the sergeant pointed out, and so they agreed on the one that sent him to Coventry.

"Some of the Lancer officers got hold of this and swore they believed it true; but meantime the government had had the devil's own time in tiding his lordship the general over the numerous blunders he had made in the campaign, and the Lancers were summarily ordered off elsewhere. There was no one left to take up poor Archie's cause at home, and the thing died out."

"By the Lord Harry, Mr. Ewen, it wouldn't die out here! We Yankees would resurrect such a thing if it were old as a mummy."

"Sometimes I think old Maitland would be glad of the chance to do it, even broken as he is; sometimes, Mrs. Cowan says, he walks the floor all night and holds Archie's last letter in his hands. *She* thinks he charges himself with having driven the boy to suicide."

"Does Miss Maitland never revisit the old home?" asked Perry, after a moment's thought.

"She goes with her father—everywhere. He is never here more than twice a year, and seldom for more than six weeks at a time. Were it not for her, though, he would settle down here, I believe. He went to Cape Colony and tried to find the men who gave out that story, but one of them was dead and the other had utterly disappeared. There were still six survivors of that escort, the sergeant among them, and he was a man of some position and property. They stuck to the

original story, and said the two men who started the sensation were mere blackmailing vagrants. Maitland advertised everywhere for the missing man, but to no purpose. I think he and Miss Gladys have finally abandoned all hope of ever righting Archie's name. She was only a child when it all happened, but she worshipped him, and never for an instant has believed the story of his having funked. She's out here riding somewhere this morning, by the way."

"Who! Miss Maitland?" exclaimed Perry, with sudden start, and a flash of eager light in his blue eyes.

Ewen smiled quietly as he answered, "Yes. She needed exercise, and wanted to come down to the gate and meet Dr. Quin. She went on up the valley; and I wonder she is not back."

The bright light faded quickly as it came; the glad blue eyes clouded heavily. Ewen looked at the young soldier, surprise in his florid face,—surprise that quickly deepened into concern, for Perry turned suddenly away, as though looking for his comrades of the hunt.

"I think they're coming now," said the manager, peering up the valley under the shading willows. "Yes! Won't you stop a bit?"

"Not now," was the hurried reply. "Thank you for that story: it has given me a lot to think about. I'll see you again." The last words were almost shouted back; for, urged by sudden dig of the spur, Nolan indignantly lashed his heels, then rushed in wrathful gallop towards the eastern bluffs. It was no wilful pang his rider had inflicted on his pet and comrade; it was only the involuntary transmission of the shock to his own young heart,—a cruel, jealous stab, that came with those thoughtless words, "She wanted to come down to the gate and meet Dr. Quin, and went on up the valley." He would not even look back and see her riding by that man's side.

XII.

To use the expression of Mr. Dana, "Ned Perry seemed off his feed" for a day or two. The hunt had been pronounced a big success, despite the fact of Perry's defection,—he had not even joined them at luncheon,—and it was agreed that it should be repeated the first bright day after muster. That ceremony came off on Monday with due pomp and formality and much rigidity of inspection on the part of the post commander. It was watched with interest by the ladies, and Mrs. Belknap even proposed that when the barracks and kitchens were being visited they should go along. Dana had been her devotee ever since the day of the hunt, and announced his willingness to carry her suggestion to the colonel, but Belknap declined. She wanted a few words with Perry, and did not know how to effect her purpose. When he stopped and spoke to her after parade on Saturday evening and would have made peace, she thought to complete her apparent conquest by a show of womanly displeasure at his conduct, and an assurance that, thanks to Mr. Dana, the day had been delightful and *his* failure to accompany her had been of no consequence at all. The utterly unexpected way in which he took it was simply a "stunner" to the little lady. So far from being piqued and jealous and huffy, as she

expected, Mr. Perry justified the oft-expressed opinion of her sisterhood to the effect that "men were simply past all comprehension" by brightening up instantly and expressing such relief at her information that for a moment she was too dazed to speak. By that time he had pleasantly said good-night and vanished; nor had he been near her since, except to bow and look pleased when she walked by with Dana. She never thought of him as an actor before, but this, said Mrs. Belknap to herself, *looks* like consummate acting. Had she known of, or even suspected, the existence of a woman who had interposed and cast her into the shade, the explanation would have occurred to her at once; but that there was a goddess in the shape of Gladys Maitland within a day's ride of Rossiter she never dreamed for an instant. Believing that no other woman could have unseated her, Mrs. Belknap simply *could* not account for such utter—such unutterable—complacency on the part of her lately favored admirer in his virtual dismissal. All Sunday and Monday she looked for signs of sulking or surrender, but looked in vain. Perry seemed unusually grave and silent, was Parke's report of the situation; but whatever comfort she might have derived from that knowledge was utterly destroyed by the way he brightened up and looked pleased whenever they chanced to meet. Monday evening he stopped to speak with her on the walk, holding out his hand and fairly beaming upon her: she icily received these demonstrations, but failed to chill them or him. Then she essayed to make him suffer the pangs of the jilted by clinging to Dana's arm and smiling up in Dana's face, and then she suddenly started: "Oh, Mr. Dana! How could I have been so thoughtless?—and this is your wounded side!" Dana protested that her slight weight was soothing balm, not additional pain, and Perry promptly asseverated that if he were Dana he would beg her not to quit his arm, and her eyes looked scorn at him as she said, "How can you know anything about it, Mr. Perry? You've never been in action or got a scratch, while Mr. Dana"—and now the dark eyes spoke volumes as they looked up into those of her escort—"Mr. Dana is one of the heroes of the fighting days of the regiment." Even *that* failed to crush him; while it had the effect of making Dana feel mawkish and absurd. Perry frankly responded that he only wondered the women ever could find time to show any civility whatever to fellows like him, when there were so many who "had records." She was completely at a loss to fathom him, and when tattoo came on Monday night, and they were all discussing the project of a run with the hounds for the coming morrow,—a May-day celebration on new principles,—Mrs. Belknap resolved upon a change of tactics.

Dana was officer of the guard and over at the guard-house, but nearly all the other officers were chatting about the veranda and the gate of the colonel's quarters. Thither had Captain Belknap escorted his pretty wife, and she was, as usual, the centre of an interested group. Perry came strolling along after reporting the result of tattoo roll-call to the adjutant, and Captain Stryker called to him and asked some question about the men on stable-guard. The orders of the colonel with regard to watching the movements of the men after the night roll-call were being closely observed, and when the trumpets sounded "taps," a few

moments later, several of the troop-commanders walked away together, and this left a smaller party. It was just at this juncture that Mrs. Belknap's sweet voice was heard addressing the commanding officer:

"Oh, colonel! Ever since Thursday I have been telling Captain Belknap about those lovely albums of yours; and he is so anxious to see them. *Could* he have a look at them to-night?"

"Why, certainly!" exclaimed the colonel, all heartiness and pleasure. "Come right in, Belknap, come in,—any of you,—all of you,—where it's good and light." And he hospitably held open the screen door. Perry had seen the albums a dozen times, but he was for going in with the others, when he felt a little hand-pressure on his arm, and Mrs. Belknap's great dark eyes were gazing up into his with mournful, incredulous appeal.

"Don't you know I want to see you?" she murmured so that only he could hear. "Wait!"

And, much bewildered, Mr. Perry waited.

She stood where she could look through the screen door into the parlor beyond, watching furtively until the party were grouped under the hanging lamps and absorbed in looking over one another's shoulders at the famous albums; then, beckoning to him to follow, she flitted, like some eerie sprite, on tiptoe to the southern end of the veranda, where clustering vines hid her from view from the walk along the parade. Perry began to feel queer, as he afterwards expressed it, but he stalked along after her, declining to modulate the thunder of his heavy heels upon the resounding gallery. She put her finger to her lips, and, after a nervous glance around, looked at him warningly, beseechingly.

"What on earth's the matter?" was all the perplexed and callow youth could find to say, and in a tone so utterly devoid of romance, sentiment, tenderness,—anything she wanted to hear,—that in all her experience—and she had had not a little—pretty, bewitching little Mrs. Belknap could recall nothing so humiliating.

"How *can* you be so unkind to me?" at last she whispered, in the tragic tremolo she well knew to be effective: it had done execution over and again. But big, handsome Ned Perry looked only like one in a maze; then he bent over her in genuine concern:

"Why, Mrs. Belknap! What *has* happened? What has gone wrong? What *do* you mean by unkindness?"

She faced him, indignantly now: "Is it possible you profess not to know?"

"By all that's holy, Mrs. Belknap, I haven't an idea of what you mean to charge me with. Tell me, and I'll make every amend I know how."

He was bending over her in genuine distress and trouble: he had no thought but to assure her of his innocence of any conscious wrong. She was leaning upon the balcony rail, and he rested one strong hand upon the post at the shaded corner, above her head, as he bowed his own to catch her reply.

For a moment she turned her face away, her bosom heaving, her little hands clasping nervously, the picture of wronged and sorrowing

womanhood. His blunt, rugged honesty was something she had never yet had to deal with. This indeed was "game worth the candle," but something of a higher order than the threadbare flirtations she had found so palatable heretofore. She had expected him to be revealed by this time as the admirer who had only been playing a part in his apparent acceptance of the situation of the last two days; she expected to be accused of coquetting with Dana, of neglect, coldness, insult towards himself; and this she would have welcomed: it would have shown him still a victim in her toils, a mouse she might toy and play with indefinitely before bestowing the final *coup de grâce*. But instead of it, or anything like it, here stood the tall, handsome young fellow, utterly ignoring the possibility of her having wronged him, and only begging to be told how he had affronted her, that he might make immediate amends. It was simply exasperating. She turned suddenly upon him, hiding her face in her hands, almost sobbing:

"And I thought we were such—such friends!"

Even that suggestive tentative did not lay him prostrate. Fancy the utter inadequacy of his response:

"Why, so did I!" This was too much. Down came the hands, and were laid in frantic appeal upon his breast. He did not bar the way; she could have slipped from the corner without difficulty; but the other method was more dramatic.

"Let me go, Mr. Perry," she pleaded. "I—I might have known; I might have known." The accents were stifled, heart-rending.

"Don't go yet, Mrs. Belknap; *don't* go without telling me what—what I've done." And poor Ned imploringly seized the little hands in both his and held them tight. "Please tell me," he pleaded.

"No, no! You would not understand; you do not see what I have to bear. Let me go, I beg,—please. I cannot stay." And her great dark eyes, swimming in tears, were raised to his face, while with faint—very faint—struggles she strove to pull her hands away, relenting in her purpose to go the moment she felt that he was relaxing the hold in which they were clasped, but suddenly wrenching them from his breast and darting from his side, leaving Perry in much bewilderment to face about and confront the doctor.

A little opening had been left in the railing at the south end of the veranda,—the same through which the post surgeon had passed the night Mrs. Lawrence had shown to Perry the answering signal-light: it was the doctor's "short cut" between the colonel's quarters and his own side-door, and soft, unbetraying turf lay there between. Absorbed in her melodrama, Mrs. Belknap had failed to note the coming of the intruder; absorbed in his own stupefaction and his fair partner's apparent depth of woe, Ned Perry heard nothing but her soft words and softer sighs, until a deep voice at his shoulder—a voice whose accent betrayed no apology for the discovery and less sympathy for the discovered—gave utterance to this uncompromising sentiment:

"Mrs. Belknap, this is the thirtieth—not the first—of April."

"And what has that to do with your sudden appearance, Dr. Quin?" answered the lady, with smiling lips but flashing eyes. She rallied from the shock of sudden volley like the veteran she was, and took the

brunt of the fight on her own white, gleaming shoulders, needing no aid from the young fellow who stood there, flushing, annoyed, yet too perturbed to say a word even had there been a chance to get one in edgewise. Blunt as he was, he could not but realize the awkwardness of the situation. And to be so misjudged by such a man as Dr. Quin! All this was flashing through his mind as the doctor answered,—

"Nothing with *my* appearance, Mrs. Belknap: it was *yours* I remarked upon. You seemed to think it All Fools' Day."

"Far from it, doctor, when I thought you miles away."

"Well, well, Mrs. Belknap," said Quin, shrugging his broad shoulders and laughing at her undaunted pluck, "I've known you fifteen years, and never have found you at a loss for a sharp retort."

"In all the years you *have* known me, doctor, as child, as maid, as woman, you are the only man in the army who ever put me on the defensive. I see clearly that you would taunt me because of this interview with Mr. Perry. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, Dr. Quin! You are the last man in this garrison—cavalry and all—who can afford to throw stones."

"Whew-w-w!" whistled the doctor. "What a little spitfire you always were, to be sure!—Mr. Perry," said he, turning suddenly on the young officer, "let me at once apologize for a very misleading observation. When I spoke of having known Mrs. Belknap fifteen years she instantly thought I meant to make her out very much older than she is; and hence these recriminations. She always objected to me because I used to tease her when she was in her first long dresses,—the prettiest girl at Fort Leavenworth,—and she's never gotten over it. But her father and I were good friends, and I should like to be an honest one to his daughter. Good-night to you both."

"One moment, Dr. Quin," said Perry, springing forward. "You have seen fit to make comments and insinuations that have annoyed Mrs. Belknap at a time when she was under my escort——"

"Oh, Mr. Perry, no! no!" exclaimed Mrs. Belknap, laying her hand on his arm. "Not a word of that kind, I implore! *Hush!* here comes my husband."

"Ah, Belknap," said the doctor, blandly, as the big captain came hurriedly forth with searching glance along the dark gallery, "here you find me, as usual, trying to be devoted to Mrs. B. whenever I can get you out of the way. Why the jeuce can't you stay?"

"Oh, it's you, is it, doctor?" answered the captain, in tones of evident relief. "It is far too chilly for this young woman to be sitting here without a wrap, is it not? Come inside, Dolly. Come, doctor.—Halloo! what's that?"

A cavalry trumpeter came springing through the gate and up on the veranda.

"Is Captain Stryker here?" he panted.

"No. What's the matter?" demanded Perry.

"Trouble at the stables, sir. Sergeant Gwynne's assaulted again."

Perry sprang from the veranda and went tearing across the dark level of the parade as fast as active legs could carry him, leaving the doctor far behind. As he passed the company quarters he noted that

several men were leaping from their broad galleries, some just pulling on a blouse, others in their shirt-sleeves, but all hastening towards the stables, where dim lights could be seen flitting about like will-o'-the-wisps. One of these troopers came bounding to his side, and would have passed him in the race. He recognized the athletic form even in the darkness, and hailed him:

"That you, Sergeant Leary? What's gone wrong?"

"It's thim blackguards from below, sir. Who else could it be?"

"Those people at the ranch?"

"The very ones, sir. No one else would harm Sergeant Gwynne. Sure we ought to have wound 'em up the one night we had a chance, sir."

Breathless, almost, they reached the stables. The horses were all snorting, stamping, and plunging about in their stalls, showing every indication of excitement and alarm. From the stables of the adjoining companies other men had come with lanterns, and a group of perhaps half a dozen troopers was gathered about the form of a cavalry sergeant who was seated, limp and exhausted, at the western door-way. One soldier was bathing his face with a sponge; the first sergeant of the troop was bending over and trying to feel the pulse.

"Stand back, you men!" he said, authoritatively, as he caught sight of the lieutenant's shoulder-straps. "Leave a lantern here.—Now, Gwynne, here's Lieutenant Perry. Can you tell him who it was?"

Gwynne feebly strove to rise, but Perry checked him.

"Sit down! The doctor is coming; don't attempt to move," panted the young officer. "Tell me what *you* know about it, Sergeant Hosmer."

"Nothing but this, sir. I was in the office, when Trumpeter Petersen ran in and said they were killing Sergeant Gwynne. I sent him for the captain and grabbed my revolver and ran here as hard as I could. He was lying just outside the door when I got here, and not another soul in sight. Sergeant Ross, of F Troop, and Sergeant Fagan, of B, came with their lanterns from the stables next door; but they had not even heard the trouble."

"Where was the stable-guard?"

"Inside, sir, and he's there now. He heard the scuffle, he says, and ran to give the alarm and to protect the sergeant, but the men scattered when he came, and he saw none of them."

"Tell him to come here. Let some of these men go in and quiet the horses. The captain will be here in a minute, and he will want to see that stable-man. Who is it?"

"Kelly, sir."

By this time Dr. Quin came lumbering heavily up the slope to the stable door. His manner was very quiet and very grave as he bent over the injured man and carefully studied his face by the light of the sergeant's lamp. Gwynne partially opened his eyes and turned his head as though the glare were too painful. The doctor spoke gently:

"You know me, sergeant?—Dr. Quin. Can you tell me what struck you? Are you hurt elsewhere than in the head?"

Gwynne made no reply for a moment, then faintly answered,—

"Stunned, mainly, and one or two kicks after I was knocked down."

Then came a deeper voice, quiet but authoritative, and the group that had begun to close in again about the doctor and his patient fell back as Captain Stryker strode into their midst.

"Sergeant Hosmer, send all these men of the troop back to their quarters at once, and permit no more to come out.—Is he much hurt, doctor?"

"Somewhat stunned, he says. I've made no examination yet."

The captain looked about him. Except one sergeant holding a lantern, the other troopers, obedient to his order, were slowly fading back into the darkness on their way to the barracks. Only the doctor, Mr. Perry, and the sergeant remained by the side of the injured man. Then came the question,—

"Who did this, Gwynne?"

No answer. A deeper shade of pain and trouble seemed to pass over the young sergeant's face. He made an effort to speak, hesitated, and at last replied,—

"I cannot say, sir."

"You know, do you not?"

Again pained silence and embarrassment. At last the sergeant leaned slowly forward and spoke:

"Captain, the men were masked, the voices disguised. I could not see the dress in the darkness. I was struck on the head almost the instant I got outside the door, and it would be impossible for me to identify one of them."

"Do you think it was the same gang you had the trouble with at Dunraven?"

"I—could not say, sir."

"Do you suspect any of our own men?"

"I—would not say that, sir."

"Where is the stable-guard?" asked Stryker. "Send him here."

And presently Trooper Kelly—a wiry little Irishman, with a twinkling eye and an expression of mingled devilment and imperturbability in his face—came forth from the stable door and stood attention, awaiting his examination.

"Where were you when this assault took place, Kelly?"

"At the far end of the stables, sir," replied Kelly, with prompt and confident tone.

"Then of course you saw and know nothing of it."

"Not a wor-rad, sir."

"Why did you let a gang from that English ranch come here and beat your sergeant before your very eyes?"

Kelly reddened at the very idea:

"I'd ha' died first, sir! Sure they'd niver dared——" And then Kelly stopped short. His Celtic pride had been touched to the quick, and had it not proved too much for even Irish wit?

"How did they get the sergeant out of the stable at this hour of the night?"

"Sure they called him out, sir."

"And the sergeant happened to be down there by the door at the time?"

"No, sir: he was in his room, beyant,—up there by the forage."

"That's a long distance from this door, Kelly; and if he could hear it in his room you could hear it farther away."

"I wasn't farther away thin, sir: I was down here when they axed for him."

"Then why didn't you open the door and see who was making such a racket, shouting for Sergeant Gwynne after taps?"

"Sure they didn't shout at all at all, sir; they axed for him quiet and respectable like, an' I wint and told him."

"Ah, yes, I see. And then, having told him, you went away to the far end of the stable."

"Yis, sir,—just so, sir; an' the moment I heard the scrimmidge, sir, I ran as hard as I could."

"Of course you considered it was none of your business what people might want with the stable-sergeant at night."

"No, sir. If he wanted me he had a right to tell me to come."

"We differ on that point, Kelly," said the captain, quietly. "For a guard, you displayed a lack of curiosity that is simply fatal.—Relieve him, Sergeant Hosmer," he continued, placidly, and then, taking Perry by the arm, led him to one side. There was a few minutes' low-toned talk between the officers while Gwynne was being led away by the doctor, and when on the following morning Colonel Brainard looked over the report of Captain Stryker's troop he was surprised to note in the column of remarks explanatory of the alterations from the status of the previous day,—

"Sergeant Gwynne from daily duty as stable-sergeant to sick in hospital, Sergeant Leary from duty to arrest, and Private Kelly from duty to confinement."

XIII.

Notwithstanding the fact that there was an atmosphere of suppressed excitement over the garrison this May-day morning, Mrs. Belknap's hunt came off according to plan, and the three heroines of the previous run rode forth with but slight change of escort. Captain Stryker felt constrained to remain in garrison: he had a quiet investigation to make, and was observed to be in close conversation with Dr. Quin as the gay party assembled in front of Colonel Brainard's quarters. Mr. Perry appeared in his captain's stead, and very politely requested the honor of being escort to Mrs. Lawrence, who accepted, yet looked a trifle embarrassed as she did so. Indeed, not until she had stolen an appealing glance at her husband and heard his cordial "By all means, dear: Perry can guide you far better than I, and perhaps you'll win another mask," did she thankfully say "Yes." Dana rode with Mrs. Belknap, as before, and it was the colonel himself who suggested to Stryker that Mr. Perry should accompany Mrs. Lawrence this day, and that he, the colonel, should ride with Mrs. Sprague.

Perry had eagerly lent himself to the proposition: he figured that now he could have an uninterrupted chat with Mrs. Lawrence and hear

what she had to tell about Dunraven. Just before starting he sought Captain Lawrence, laughingly told him the terms of their agreement, and begged that he would relax his marital injunction and permit her to give him such details as she happened to be in possession of. "Indeed, Captain Lawrence," he said, "I ask from no idle curiosity. I have been to the ranch, as you now know, and have good reason for asking." To his surprise, the captain replied substantially that, while he had regretted Mrs. Lawrence's impulsive revelations, he had thought it all over and decided that the best way out was that Perry should be told the whole story and be able to see how very little there was to it. He had decided, therefore, to tell him himself; "and this evening, Perry, if you will dine with us informally, we'll talk it over afterwards. Meantime, I prefer Mrs. Lawrence's name should not be mentioned in connection with any story there may be afloat: so oblige me by saying nothing to her on the subject."

This was one matter for reflection, and something of a surprise; but there was still another, and even greater one. That very morning, just before guard-mount, and while he was dressing, Perry shouted, "Come in," responsive to a knock at his sitting-room door, and in came Captain Stryker. The object of his early call was explained in very few words.

"Perry," said he, "I have been over to see Sergeant Gwynne this morning, and the doctor walked back from hospital with me and told me of your threatened disagreement of last night. If it had not been for that sudden call to the stables I fancy there might have been a quarrel. Now, I think you know I'm one of the last men to let an officer of my regiment—especially my troop—be placed in a false position, and—you can afford to leave this matter in my hands, can you not?"

"Certainly, Captain Stryker."

"Then I want you to say nothing to Quin on the subject, and to treat him, as far as possible, as though nothing had happened. His relations with the lady's father and family were, and are, such that she ought to treat him with respect and deference, and to accept his advice even though it be given in a style that Carlyle, his favorite author, is mainly responsible for."

"There was absolutely nothing in—in that—— Well, captain," stammered poor Ned, "I don't know how to say what I want to say." He wanted to say there was nothing in that interview which could possibly be criticised, but it suddenly occurred to him that, on the contrary, there was a good deal. Then he desired to assure his captain that, so far as *he* was concerned, there wasn't a suspicion of wrong-doing; but—heavens and earth!—that was equivalent to saying the lady was doing all that was open to remark, and nothing would ever induce him to "give away a woman," as he would have expressed it. Perry stammered and reddened all the more, and at last gave it up in despair, Stryker sitting there the while with a quiet grin on his bronzed face, and mechanically slashing his boot-legs with a riding-switch.

"I think I understand the situation, Perry, and there's no great harm done. Only, let the matter drop,—so far as the doctor is con-

cerned, I mean: I do not presume to obtrude advice upon you as to anything else."

And, though he had meditated a different course, and had fully intended hunting up Dana and sending him with a note to call upon the doctor for an "explanation," he was glad to have a man of Stryker's standing cry halt. All the same he was sore incensed against Dr. Quin,—mainly because of the jealous pain he suffered at the knowledge of his being so welcomed by Gladys Maitland when he saw fit to visit the ranch; and this pain gnawed all the more angrily now at thought of the embarrassing—even suspicious—situation in which that very man had found him on the previous evening. Pressing duties and hurried preparations kept him from brooding too much upon these sore points, but the youngsters all rallied him upon his preoccupation while at their merry breakfast-table. He had resolved that there was one thing he could and would bring to an issue with Dr. Quin, and was all impatience for the coming of evening, that he might hear from the lips of Captain Lawrence the actual stories that had been in circulation concerning Dunraven Ranch. He never went out to a hunt so utterly indifferent to the fortunes of the day, so eager to have it all over and done with. And yet—and yet—never had there opened to him a day so radiant with glorious possibility; never before in all his young life had nightfall proved so unwelcome when it finally came.

The first rabbit was started before they were a mile from Rossiter, and the hounds tumbled over him nearly a league away down the valley of the Monee. It was while they were watering their horses in the stream that Mrs. Belknap rode up beside them and laughingly addressed Mrs. Lawrence:

"That was too much of a straight-away for either of us, Mrs. Lawrence; but what wager shall we have on the first mask after this?"

"Why, Mrs. Belknap! I can never hope to rival you. It was mere accident, and good guiding on the part of some of the officers who were kind enough to stay by me, that enabled me to be 'in at the death' the other day."

"You have Mr. Perry to lead you to-day. Surely with such a guide you ought to be inspired.—Am I to see *anything* of you to-day?" she almost whispered to him, as her stirrup brushed his riding-boot.

"Certainly," he answered, quietly, and looking her over with frank blue eyes that were rather too clear and calm for her mood. "If Mrs. Lawrence will excuse me a few moments by and by, it will be a pleasure to come and ride with you. I'll ask her."

"Indeed you shall not," was the low-toned reply, while the dark eyes fairly snapped with indignation. "I do not borrow other women's escort. If you know no other way, that ends it."

And then Mrs. Sprague's cheery voice had hailed them as her eager horse came splashing into the stream; no opportunity occurred for further impressive remarks, but as the "field" rode out upon the prairie again and the dogs spread their yelping skirmish-line along the front, Mrs. Belknap felt confident that before they returned to Rossiter she would have her big, simple-hearted admirer in some shape for discipline. Two capital runs added to her self-satisfaction, for in one of

them she was side by side with the foremost rider at the finish, and in both she had left the other women far in rear. Then came a third, and with it a revelation to one and all.

It was almost noon, and from a point well out on the prairie to the northeast of Dunraven the "field" was hunting slowly homeward, horses and hounds pretty well tired out, and the riders quite content with their morning's sport. Up to this time Perry had been in constant attendance on Mrs. Lawrence, and had made no effort to join Mrs. Belknap. Now, however, he could not but see that every little while her eyes sought his with significant glance and that she was riding well out to the left of the party, Dana faithfully hovering about her. The colonel with Mrs. Sprague ranged alongside just then, and a general conversation ensued, in the course of which Perry found himself a trifle in the way. If there was one thing fastidious Nolan did not like, it was to be crowded by horses for whom he had no particular respect; and, as a number of riders were grouped about Mrs. Lawrence at the moment, it resulted that Nolan's teeth and heels began to make play, and Perry laughingly resigned his position at her side, in order, as he expressed it, "to give you other fellows a chance." Even then, as he fell to the rear, it was with no thought or intention of joining Mrs. Belknap. But, once clear of the merry group, his eyes sought the distant outlines of Dunraven Ranch, glaring in the noonday sun beyond the Monee, and between him and that mysterious enclosure whither his thoughts were so constantly wandering there rode the dainty lady, the Queen of the Chase, so far as that day was concerned at least, and she was signalling to him with her riding-whip. Oddly enough, when Perry rode up to obey her summons, Mr. Dana presently found means to excuse himself and join the main body.

"Mr. Perry," she said, as soon as Dana was out of hearing, "Mrs. Page will be with us to-night, or to-morrow morning at latest."

"Will she?" answered he, unconscious, forgetful, and with an air of pleased anticipation. "How pleasant for you! I'll come and pay my respects the very first thing."

"You do not understand," was the reproachful response. "You do not care, I presume; but this means that you and I will have no more long talks and happy times together."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Belknap, but I'm blessed if I can see why we shouldn't."

"No," despairingly, "it is plain enough that you see nothing. Ah, well!"—and the sigh was pathetic-profound, and the look from the dark eyes was unutterable in its sadness, "I suppose it is better so,—better so." She was silent a moment, and Perry's puzzled faculties took refuge in a long look over towards Dunraven again: he fancied he saw figures moving down the slope on the southern side.

"One thing I want you to promise me," she presently said, sad and soft and low. There was no reply. Looking up, she saw his head was averted. Was he feeling the sting, then, after all? Was he actually suffering a little pang after this affectation of nonchalance?

"One thing you must promise, for my sake," she repeated.

And still no answer came. How odd! He was bending over in

the saddle as though turning from her,—perhaps to hide his face from her and from them all. He had shifted the reins into his right hand, and was apparently fumbling at the breast of his riding-coat with the left. Was it the handkerchief he needed? Were there starting tears in those blue eyes that he dared not let her see? She could not lose that luxury! Out went the little hand and touched his arm. Her tone was sweet, thrilling, appealing, yet commanding: she *would* see his face.

"Mr. Perry,—*Ned! Look* at me."

"Eh! oh! What! I *beg* your pardon, Mrs. Belknap, but I was trying to make out who that was in the timber yonder. Looks—looks almost like a woman on horseback, doesn't it?"

But when he appealed to her for confirmation of his timid, half-credulous vision he was aghast at the look in her face.

"You were not listening! You were not even *thinking* of what I was saying!" she began, her white teeth set, her soft lips livid with wrath; but she suddenly controlled herself,—none too soon, for Dana came trotting up.

"Say, Perry, what do you make that out to be down there in the valley? Colonel Brainard and I feel sure it's a lady on horseback."

And, looking at Perry, Mrs. Belknap saw that he had flushed to the very temples,—that an eager, joyous light had sprung to his eyes; but before she could say a word there came a shout from the huntsman, a yell from the leading line, a simultaneous yelp from the curs and mongrels among the "irregulars," and her horse leaped at the bit and went tearing off towards the Monee, foremost in mad pursuit of a wildly careering "jack."

"Come!" she called, as she glanced over her shoulder; but the sight was one that only added to her wrath. Nolan, plunging and snorting, was held to the spot, while his rider, sitting like a centaur, was still eagerly gazing over into the distant cottonwoods. The next instant she realized that all the field were thundering at her heels, and the instinct of the sportsman came to her aid. She *could* not be beaten in the chase.

For half a mile Bunny shot like a streak of light straight away southwestward, the hounds bunched in a slaty, sweeping cloud not thirty yards behind the bobbing tuft of his tail. Then he began a long circle towards the stream, as though to head for a "break" that extended some rods back from the line of bluffs. Another minute, and he had reached its partial shelter and darted in. For the next minute he was lost to sight of his human pursuers, but presently flashed into view again down in the creek-bottom and "streaking it" up along the northern bank, with the whole pack at his heels. The bluffs were steep just here, some of the riders a trifle timid, and all the "field" reined in a little as they made the descent; Dana, Mrs. Belknap, Parke, Mrs. Lawrence, Graham, the colonel, and Mrs. Sprague straightened out for their pursuit in the order named the instant they reached the level of the valley. The hounds were far ahead by this time, and the two light troopers in charge of them close at their heels; but who—what was the figure that flashed into view between those huntsmen and the field,

darting like arrow from the fringe of willows and dashing straight in wake of the quarry? Thirty yards ahead of the foremost riders of the Rossiter party a superb English hunter, the bit in his teeth, his eyes afire and his head high in air, fresh, vigorous, raging with long-imprisoned passion for the sport of the old island home, gaining on the hounds at every stride, and defying the utmost efforts of his rider, leaped from the covert of the timber into sight of one and all, bearing a lovely but most reluctant victim on his back.

In vain with might and main she leaned back and tugged at the reins: though checked in his speed, the horse still tore ahead, keeping straight for the hounds, leaping in his easy stride every little gully or "branch" that crossed his path. Bunny took a sudden dive into the timber, fairly flew across a narrow, gravelly rapid, and darted up on the opposite bank; the hounds veered in pursuit, the huntsmen wavered and sought along the bank for a better place to cross, but the mettlesome English bay lunged through in the very wake of the hounds, crumbling the sandy banks and crashing through the pebbly stream-bed. Out on the southern slopes went Bunny, close followed by the hounds; out on their trail went the big hunter, but his rider's hat has been brushed away in the wild dash though the timber, and now a flame of beautiful golden hair—a great wave of light—flies on the wind over his glossy back, and, though she still leans over the cantle tugging hard at the reins, she is plainly losing strength. Some of the Rossiter party burst through the timber in pursuit; some still ride hopefully up the north bank, and these are rewarded, for once again poor, badgered, bewildered Bunny makes a sudden swerve, and, throwing half the hounds far behind, darts a second time to the shelter of the banks, with the other half closer at his heels than before. Those who are watching see the big hunter make a long, circular sweep, then once again bring up in the wake of the leaders, once more go leaping, plunging, crashing through the stream, and, in another minute, rabbit, hounds, huntsmen, the "field," and the fair incognita are all strung out in chase along the northern shore, and all eyes can see that *she* is an English girl and wellnigh exhausted. Still, no man can catch that hunter and lay hands on the rein. She is riding with the very foremost now, leading the troopers, even, and still Bunny spins along in front, the hounds gnashing not six feet behind him. A little point of bluff juts out just ahead; the stream winds around its base and takes a turn northward for a dozen rods. Bunny shoots the turn like the pilot of the lightning express, the hounds strain to make it without loss of vantage gained, the big hunter sways outward to the very verge of the steep and crumbling bank, and a groan goes up from the breathless pursuers; but he rallies and straightens once more in the track, and the golden hair, streaming in the advance, is the *oriflamme* of the chase. Then as they round the point Dana gives a shout of joy. Straight down the slopes, straight and swift as rode the daring hussar from whom he got his name, when he bore the fatal message like arrow-flight from the Sapouné crest at Balaklava, down the bluffs to the right front comes Nolan, with Ned Perry on his back,—Perry with set, resolute, yet almost frenzied face,—Perry with eyes that flash blue fire in the in-

tensity of their gaze,—and Nolan's vigorous strides have brought him in circling sweep, in just ten seconds more, close to the hunter's quarter, close behind the fluttering skirt. Just ahead there is another sudden turn to the left: the stream goes one way, the bluffs another, and between them lies a five-acre patch of level prairie thickly studded, here, there, everywhere, with tiny earthen mounds and tiny, gaping, treacherous holes,—a prairie-dog village, by all that's awful! and that runaway hunter, mad in the chase of the sweeping hounds, is in the midst of it before mortal hand can check or swerve him. Another second, and they who pursue have veered to right or left or reined up on the verge,—all save one. Never faltering, Ned Perry is at her hunter's quarter,—almost at her side. They see him spurring, they see him bending eagerly towards her, they *see* that he is shouting something to her,—Heaven knows what! Then there is a groan of misery and dread from a dozen breasts,—a groan that as suddenly bursts into the gladdest of cheers: the hunter's forefoot has caught in one of the thousand little death-traps; down he goes, plunging, heaving, quivering, rolling over and over; but Nolan leaps gallantly ahead, and Ned Perry's strong arm has lifted the girl from the saddle as her steed goes crashing to earth, and bears her, drooping, faint, frightened, wellnigh senseless, but safe and clasped tight to his thankful and exultant heart.

Another instant, and Nolan is reined in in the very midst of the tumbling hounds, and Gladys Maitland is the only woman "in at the death."

XIV.

The group that gathers there a moment later is as interested a party as the central figures are interesting. Unable to set her left foot to the ground, and still encircled by Perry's arm, Miss Maitland stands leaning heavily on his breast. She is very pale for a moment, partly from exhaustion, partly from pain, for there was no time to free her foot from the stirrup, and the ankle is severely wrenched. Nolan, riderless now and cast loose, stands with lowered head and heaving flanks a sympathetic but proudly heroic looker-on: he knows he has played his part in that rescue. The huge English hunter is plunging in misery among the mounds a few yards back, his fore-leg broken. One of the troopers has seized his bridle, and another is unstrapping the heavy English saddle. "Splendidly done!" says the colonel, as he trots carefully up, casting a glance at the fallen cause of all the mischief, "but if that saddle had been one of those three-pronged abominations he couldn't have swept her off as he did." Graham has galloped to the stream for water, and the colonel lifts Mrs. Sprague from her saddle, and together they advance to offer sympathy and aid. Mrs. Lawrence follows as quickly as she can pick her way among the prairie-dog holes. Dana has deserted Mrs. Belknap, and she alone remains mounted while all these others throng about the two who stand there for the moment, clinging to each other. And now Gladys Maitland has raised her head; blushes of shame and confusion triumph over pallor and pain; she strives to stand alone, but Perry bids her desist. The moment she sees Mrs. Sprague's sweet, womanly, sympa-

thetic face her eyes are filled with comfort and her heart goes out to her. Most reluctantly Perry resigns his prize to the arms that open to receive her, and then come the wondering exclamations of some, and the brief, breathless explanations.

"Don't try to talk yet," pleads Mrs. Sprague. "We are only too glad it was no worse."

"Indeed, I'm not hurt," answers Gladys, bravely,—"only a little wrench, but," and she laughs nervously, trying to carry it off with all the pluck and spirit of her race, "it would have been what we call a 'nasty cropper' at home if"—and her eyes turn shyly yet with a world of gratitude to his—"it had not been for Mr. Perry."

"Oh, then you know Mr. Perry!" exclaims Mrs. Sprague, with frank delight, and Mrs. Lawrence turns in rejoicing to look first in his glowing face, then at the dark beauty of Mrs. Belknap silently listening. "Why, we had no idea——" And she concludes irresolutely.

"Oh, yes: we met at the ranch,—at home. I am Miss Maitland, you know; and that is my father's place. But we've only just come," she adds, with the woman's natural desire to explain to new-found friends why and how it was that they had not met before. And then the group is joined by a bulky young Briton in the garb of a groom, though modified to suit the requirements of frontier life: he comes cantering to the scene all elbows and consternation; he gives a groan of dismay at sight of the prostrate hunter, but rides directly to his mistress. She is paling again now, and in evident pain, and Perry's face is a study as he stands, his eyes riveted upon her; but she strives to smile and reassure him.

"You'll have to ride to Dunr—to the ranch, Griggs," she said; "and—there's no help for it—papa will have to be told. Let them send for me."

"Pardon me, Miss Maitland," interrupted Colonel Brainard. "You are almost under the walls of Fort Rossiter, and Dunraven is miles away. I have sent a swift horse for Dr. Quin and a spring ambulance. We cannot let you go home, now that you are so near us, until you have had rest and proper care."

"Indeed we cannot, Miss Maitland," chimed in both ladies at a breath. "You are to come right to my house until you are fit to travel."

"I'm not very fit just now, certainly," she answers, with a faint smile; "but I can surely wait here until they send: 'twill not be more than an hour at most."

"It will be two hours,—perhaps three,—Miss Maitland," pleaded Perry, bending eagerly forward. "*Do* listen to our ladies!"

And "our ladies" prevailed. While Griggs went sputtering off to Dunraven with the sorrowful news, the strong arms of Perry and Graham lifted and bore their English captive to the shade of a clump of cottonwoods. Mrs. Sprague and Mrs. Lawrence managed to make a little couch for her as a temporary resort. Mrs. Belknap rode up and was formally introduced, then galloped away to Rossiter to send blankets for the picnic-couch and see to the pillows of the ambulance. The colonel and Perry remained with the ladies and engrossed their atten-

tion while Graham went back and sent two pistol-bullets into the struggling hunter's brain, stilling his pain forever. Then came Dr. Quin galloping like the wind down the familiar trail, chiding "Gladys" as though his right to do so were a long-established thing, and thereby setting Perry's teeth on edge, and, long before the call for afternoon stables was sounding, the fair daughter of Dunraven Ranch was housed within the walls of Rossiter and the "ice was broken." Perry had had the joy of helping carry her into Mrs. Sprague's coolest and cosiest room. She had held forth her hand—such a long, white, beautiful hand—and let it rest in his while she said, "You know how impossible it is for me to tell you how I thank you, Mr. Perry," and he had simply bowed over it, longing to say what he thought, but powerless to think of anything else; and then he had gone to his own quarters and shut himself in. Mrs. Sprague—bless her!—had invited him to call after retreat, and he had totally forgotten the Lawrences' dinner when he said he would be only too glad to come.

At the sounding of stable-call his darky servant banged at the door and roused him from his revery. He rose mechanically and went out into the broad sunshine, glancing first along the row to see how things were looking at the Spragues', and wishing with all his heart that they were somewhere within reach of a conservatory, that he might send a heaping box of fresh and dewy roses to that sacred room where she lay. How many a time, he thought, had he strolled into some odorous shop in the cities where his "leaves" were spent, and carelessly ordered cut flowers by the cubic foot sent with his card to some one with whom he had danced the german the night before and never expected to see again! What *wouldn't* he give now for just a few of those wasted, faded, forgotten flowers! He could see that the window was raised in the room to which they had carried her, and a soft breeze was playing in the folds of the white curtain; but no one was visible. Dreamily, and with no thought or look for other beings in the little garrison, he strode across the parade. An ambulance, dusty and travel-stained, was in front of Belknap's, and a couple of trunks—unmistakably feminine property—were being unloaded. He could have seen it, had he glanced over his left shoulder, and drawn the inference that "Mrs. Page" had arrived; but his thoughts were engrossed in the other direction. Then Graham came bounding along to join him, and near the quarters stood Captain Stryker, waiting for him, and both of them were unwilling to talk of anything but his exploit of a few hours before: it was all over the garrison by this time, and so was the news that Dunraven's fair and hitherto unknown mistress was now the guest of Fort Rossiter. All his jollity and gladness seemed to have ebbed away. Perry almost wished she were back at Dunraven and that no one knew of her existence but himself and that he were kneeling beside her once again, aiding her in restoring her stricken father to consciousness. But then he thought of the sudden arrival that had so disconcerted him that night, and to-day again. *What* did it mean that Quin assumed such airs of authority? How *dare* he call her Gladys?

Stables that afternoon proved a sore trial to him. Graham had to leave and go to his own troop; Parke took his place, and was all

lively enthusiasm and congratulation, yet wondering at the mood in which he found his friend. Stryker, after shaking his hand and saying a few words of quiet commendation, noted the constraint upon his usually lively subaltern, and wisely drew his own conclusions. The captain had been engaged much of the morning on an investigation of the mysterious assault on Sergeant Gwynne, and the developments had been such as to surround the case with additional interest, even though nothing tangible in the way of evidence was educed. He had purposed having a talk with Perry while at stables, but, after one or two searching glances at his face, Stryker concluded it best to postpone his proposed conference, and so allowed Perry to go on about his usual duties; but he smiled in his quiet way when he noted the evident relief with which his subaltern heard the order "Lead in!" that announced that grooming was over. It was fifteen minutes more, however, before the evening duties were complete; and when at last the men went swinging homeward in their white canvas frocks and Perry could return to his quarters to dress for his eagerly-anticipated call, the first thing that met his eyes as he came in sight of officers' row was a huge, bulky, covered travelling-carriage in front of Sprague's. Two or three ladies were there at the gate. Mr. Ewen, the English manager, was just mounting his horse; Dr. Quin, too, was there and already in saddle; and before poor Perry could get half-way across the parade, and just as the trumpets were sounding mess-call for supper, the bulky vehicle started; the ladies waved their handkerchiefs and kissed their hands, and, escorted by Ewen and the doctor, saluted by Colonel Brainard and the adjutant with raised forage-caps, Gladys Maitland was driven slowly away,—and Mrs. Belknap stood there in the little group of ladies smiling sweetly upon him as he hastened towards them. For many a long day afterwards mess-call always made him think of Mrs. Belknap's smile, and Mrs. Belknap's smile of mess-call. He shuddered at sound of one or sight of the other.

It was Mrs. Sprague who stepped forward to greet him, her womanly heart filled with sympathy for the sentiment she suspected. She had to push by Mrs. Belknap to reach him; but, this time, no consideration of etiquette stood in the way.

"It couldn't be helped," she said, in low, hurried tone, her kind eyes searching his, so clouded in the bitterness of his disappointment. "It couldn't be helped. The news of her accident—or something—brought on a seizure of some kind. Mr. Maitland was taken very ill, and they sent for her. The manager came, and with him her old nurse, Mrs. Cowan, and Dr. Quin said she could be moved without trouble: so she had to go. I hated to have her, too, for I've hardly had a word with her: Mrs. Belknap has been there most of the afternoon, even when she had a guest of her own just arrived, too." And Mrs. Sprague could not but show her vexation at this retrospect.

Perry stood in silence, looking yearningly after the retreating vehicle. It would take him but a few minutes to hasten to stables and saddle Nolan; he could easily catch them before they had gone two miles; but there was parade, and he could not ask to be excused. Not until he suddenly looked around and saw that Mrs. Belknap's dark eyes

were fixed in close scrutiny upon his face did he realize how he was betraying himself. Then he rallied, but with evident effort.

The colonel was standing but a few paces away, chatting with Mrs. Lawrence and his faithful adjutant. Mrs. Sprague stepped quickly towards him and spoke a few words in a low tone, while Mrs. Belknap remained looking straight into Perry's eyes. Before the young fellow could gather himself, Colonel Brainard, as though in reply to a suggestion of Mrs. Sprague's, suddenly started, exclaiming, "Why, by all means!" and then called aloud,—

"Oh! Perry, why not gallop down and overtake the Dunraven carriage and say good-by? Here's my horse all saddled now right in the yard. Take him and go: *I* would."

There was something so hearty and genial and sympathetic in the colonel's manner that Perry's face flushed despite his effort at nonchalance. The thought of seeing her again and hearing her sweet voice was a powerful incentive. He longed to go. The colonel's invitation was equivalent to an excuse from parade. There was no reason why he should not go. He was on the very point of thankfully accepting the tempting offer, when Mrs. Belknap's words arrested him. Clear and cutting, but still so low that none but he could hear, she spoke:

"Take my word for it, you are not wanted,—nor any other man,—when Dr. Quin is with her."

Perry's hesitation vanished. "Thank you, colonel. I believe I don't care to go," he answered, and, raising his cap to the ladies, turned on his heel and hurried to his quarters. Mrs. Belknap stood watching him one moment, then calmly rejoined the party at the gate.

"Well," said she, with the languid drawl that her regimental associates had learned to know so well, "this has been a day of surprises, has it not? Only fancy our having a beautiful English heiress here within reach and never knowing it until to-day!"

"But you had a surprise of your own, had you not?" interposed Mrs. Sprague, who was still chafing over the fact that her lovely and dangerous neighbor should have so monopolized the guest she considered hers by prior right, and who meant to remind her thus publicly of the neglect of which she had been guilty.

"Mrs. Page, you mean?" responded Mrs. Belknap, with the same languid, imperturbable manner. "Yes,—poor Jennie! She is always utterly used up after one of those long ambulance-journeys, and can only take a cup of tea and go to bed in a darkened room. All she wants is to be let alone, she says, until she gets over it. I suppose she will sleep till tattoo and then be up for half the night. You'll all come in and see her, *won't* you? *Au revoir.*"

And so, calmly and gracefully and victoriously, the dark-eyed dame withdrew, leaving her honest-hearted antagonist only the sense of exasperation and defeat.

It was full quarter of an hour after parade, and darkness was settling down on the garrison, when Captain Lawrence's orderly tapped at the door of Mr. Perry's quarters, and, being bidden "Come in," pushed on to the sitting-room, where he found that young officer

plunged deep in an easy-chair in front of the fireplace, his attitude one of profound dejection.

"Beg pardon, lieutenant," said the man, "but Mrs. Lawrence and the captain's waitin' dinner for you."

XV.

Two days passed without event of any kind. Socially speaking, the garrison was enlivened by the advent of Mrs. Page, and everybody flocked to the Belknaps' quarters in order to do her proper homage. When Perry called he asked Parke to go with him, and, when the latter seemed ready to leave, the former, disregarding a very palpable hint from the lady of the house, picked up his forage-cap and went likewise. For two days the one subject under constant discussion at the post was the event of Miss Maitland's sudden appearance, her perilous run, and her daring and skilful rescue. Everybody maintained that Perry ought to be a very proud and happy fellow to have been the hero of such an occasion; but it was very plain that Perry was neither proud nor anything like happy. No one had ever known him so silent and cast down. The talk with Lawrence had helped matters very little.

In brief, this was about all the captain could tell him, and it was all hearsay evidence at best. The officers of the Eleventh and their ladies had, with a few exceptions, taken a dislike to Dr. Quin before Belknap and Lawrence with their companies of infantry had been ordered to Fort Rossiter. The feeling was in full blast when they arrived, and during the six or eight months they served there together the infantry people heard only one side of the story,—that of the Eleventh,—for the doctor never condescended to discuss the matter. After he was forbidden to leave the post by his commanding officer, and after the announcement of the "blockade" of Dunraven, it was observed that signals were sometimes made from the ranch at night: a strong light thrown from a reflector was flashed three times and then withdrawn. Next it was noted, by an enterprising member of the guard, that these signals were answered by a light in the doctor's windows, then that he mounted his horse and rode away down the valley of the Monee. He was always back at sick-call; and, if any one told the commanding officer of his disobedience of orders, it was not done until so near the departure of the Eleventh that the doctor was not afterwards actually caught in the act. Things would undoubtedly have been brought to a crisis had the Eleventh been allowed to remain.

Now as to the story about Mrs. Quin and her going. It was observed during the winter that she was looking very badly, and the story went the rounds in the Eleventh that she was stung and suffering because of her husband's conduct. Unquestionably there was some fair enchantress at Dunraven who lured him from his own fireside. She had no intimates among the ladies. She was proud and silent. It did not seem to occur to them that she was resentful of their dislike of her husband. They were sure she was "pining" because of his neglect —or worse. When, therefore, without word of warning, she suddenly

took her departure in the spring, there was a gasp of gossip-loving cronies in the garrison: all doubts were at an end: she had left him and taken her children with her.

"The more I think of it," said Lawrence, "the more I believe the whole thing capable of explanation. The only thing that puzzles me now is that Quin hides anything from your colonel, who is one of the most courteous and considerate men I ever served with. Perhaps he *has* told him, by this time: we don't know. Perhaps he thought he might be of the same stamp as his predecessor, and was waiting to find out before he made his confidences. As to Mrs. Quin's going away when she did, it may have been simply that her health was suffering, she needed change, and went with his full advice and by his wish, and he simply feels too much contempt for garrison gossip to explain. Very probably he knows nothing of the stories and theories in circulation: I'm sure *I* did not until a very few weeks ago. You know, Perry, there are some men in garrison who hear and know everything, and others who never hear a word of scandal."

But Perry was low in his mind. He could not forget Quin's sudden appearance,—his calling *her* Gladys; and then he hated the thought that it was Quin who saw him having that confounded tender interview with Mrs. Belknap. Was there ever such a streak of ill luck as that? No doubt the fellow had told her all about it! Perry left Lawrence's that night very little comforted, and only one gleam of hope did he receive in the two days that followed. Mrs. Sprague joyfully beckoned to him on Wednesday afternoon to read him a little note that had just come from Miss Maitland. Her father had been very ill, she wrote; his condition was still critical; but she sent a world of thanks to her kind entertainers at Rossiter, and these words: "I was sorry not to be able to see Mr. Perry again. Do not let him think I have forgotten, or will be likely to forget, the service he—and Nolan—did me."

Of Dr. Quin he saw very little. With the full consent and knowledge of Colonel Brainard, the doctor was spending a good deal of time at Dunraven now, attending to Mr. Maitland. Indeed, there seemed to be an excellent understanding between the commandant and his medical officer, and it was known that they had had a long talk together. Upper circles in the garrison were still agitated with chat and conjecture about Gladys Maitland and her strange father; Perry was still tortured with questions about his one visit to Dunraven whenever he was so incautious as to appear in public; but all through "the quarters," everywhere among the rank and file, there was a subject that engrossed all thoughts and tongues, and that was discussed with feeling that seemed to deepen with every day,—the approaching court-martial of Sergeant Leary and of Trooper Kelly.

As a result of his investigation, Captain Stryker had preferred charges against these two men,—the one for leading and the other for being accessory to the assault on his stable-sergeant. Gwynne was still at the hospital, though rapidly recovering from his injuries. Not a word had he said that would implicate or accuse any man; but Stryker's knowledge of his soldiers, and his clear insight into human motive and

character, were such that he had readily made up his mind as to the facts in the case. He felt sure that Leary and some of the Celtic members of his company had determined to go down to Dunraven and "have it out" with the hated Britons who had so affronted and abused them the night of Perry's visit. They knew they could not get their horses by fair means, for Gwynne was above suspicion. He was English, too, and striving to shield his countrymen from the threatened vengeance. They therefore determined, in collusion with Kelly, to lure him outside the stables, bind and gag him, get their horses, having once rifled Gwynne of the keys, ride down to the ranch, and, after having a Donnybrook Fair on the premises, get back to Rossiter in plenty of time for reveille and stables. No sentries were posted in such a way as to interfere with them, and the plan was feasible enough but for one thing. Gwynne had made most gallant and spirited resistance, had fought the whole gang like a tiger, and they had been unable to overpower him before the noise had attracted the attention of the sergeant of the guard and some of the men in quarters. An effort, of course, was made to show that the assaulting party were from without, but it was futile, and Stryker's keen cross-questioning among the men had convinced them that he knew all about the matter. There was only one conclusion, therefore,—that Gwynne must have "given them away," as the troopers expressed it. Despite the fact that he had been assaulted and badly beaten, this was something that few could overlook, and the latent jealousy against the "cockney sergeant" blazed into a feeling of deep resentment. Garrison sympathy was with Leary and his fellows: they had simply done their best to wipe out a brutal insult to their officer and their regiment, and they would have succeeded, too, but for the interference and stubborn resistance of this bumptious Englishman. It arrayed all the rank and file of the —th for the defence, and there was every prospect that when the court convened—and they well knew it would be ordered—there would be some "tall swearing."

Thursday came, and Sergeant Gwynne returned to light duty, though his face was still bruised and discolored and he wore a patch over one eye. He resumed charge of the stables in the afternoon, after a brief conversation with his captain, and was superintending the issue of forage, when Perry entered to inspect the stalls of his platoon. Nolan was being led out by his groom at the moment, and pricked up his tapering ears at sight of his master and thrust his lean muzzle to receive the caress of the hand he knew so well. Perry stopped him and carefully and critically examined his knees, feeling down to the fetlocks with searching fingers for the faintest symptom of knot or swelling in the tendons that had played their part so thoroughly in the drama of Monday. Satisfied, apparently, he rose and bestowed a few hearty pats on the glossy neck and shoulder, and then was surprised to find the stable-sergeant standing close beside him and regarding both him and the horse with an expression that arrested Perry's attention at once.

"Feeling all right again, sergeant?" he asked, thinking to recall the non-commissioned officer to his senses.

"Almost, sir. I'm a trifle stiff yet. Anything wrong with Nolan, sir?"

"Nothing. I gave him rather a tough run the other day,—had to risk the prairie-dog holes,—and, though I felt no jar then, I've watched carefully ever since to see that he was not wrenched. I wish you would keep an eye on him too, will you?"

There was no answer. Perry had been looking over Nolan's haunches as he spoke, and once more turned to the sergeant. To his astonishment, Gwynne's lips were twitching and quivering, his hands, ordinarily held in the rigid pose of the English service,—extended along the thigh,—were clinching and working nervously, and something suspiciously like a tear was creeping out from under the patch. Before Perry could recover from his surprise, the sergeant suddenly regained his self-control, hastily raised his hand in salute, saying something half articulate in reply, and turned sharply away, leaving his lieutenant gazing after him in much perplexity.

That night, just after tattoo roll-call, when a little group of officers was gathered at the colonel's gate, they were suddenly joined by Dr. Quin, who came from the direction of the stable where he kept his horse in rear of his own quarters. Colonel Brainard greeted him warmly and inquired after his patient at Dunraven. Every one noted how grave and subdued was the tone in which the doctor answered,—

"He is a very sick man, colonel, and it is hard to say what will be the result of this seizure."

"You may want to go down again, doctor, if that be the case,—before sick-call to-morrow, I mean; and you had better take one of my horses. I'll tell my man to have one in readiness."

"You are very kind, sir. I think old Brian will do all the work needed. But I would like to go down at reveille, as we have no men in hospital at all now. And, by the way, is Mr. Perry here?"

"I am here," answered Perry, coldly. He was leaning against the railing, rather away from the group, listening intently, yet unwilling to meet or hold conversation with the man he conceived to be so inimical to his every hope and interest.

"Mr. Perry," said the doctor, pleasantly, and utterly ignoring the coldness of the young fellow's manner, "Mr. Maitland has asked to see you; and it would gratify him if you would ride down in the morning."

Even in the darkness Perry feared that all would see the flush that leaped to his face. Summoned to Dunraven Ranch, by her father, with a possibility of seeing *her!* It was almost too sweet! too thrilling! He could give no reply for a moment, and an awkward silence fell on the group until he chokingly answered, "I shall be glad to go. What time?"

"Better ride down early. Never mind breakfast. Miss Maitland will be glad to give you a cup of coffee, I fancy."

And Perry felt as though the fence had taken to waltzing. He made no answer, striving to regain his composure, and then the talk went on. It was Stryker who was speaking now:

"Has the ring been found, doctor?"

"No! That is a most singular thing, and one that worries the old

gentleman a great deal. It had a history: it belonged to Mrs. Maitland's father, who was from Ireland,—indeed, Ireland was her country, as it was my father's,—and that ring she had reset for her son Archie and gave it to him when he entered service with the Lancers. It was sent home with his watch and other property from South Africa,—for he died there,—and old Maitland always wore it afterwards. Archie was the last of three sons; and it broke his heart."

"And the ring was lost the night of Perry's adventure there?" asked the colonel.

"Yes. Mr. Perry remembers having seen it on his hand when the old gentleman first came down to receive him. It was missed afterwards, and could easily have slipped off at any time, for his fingers were withered with age and ill health. They have searched everywhere, and could find nothing of it. It could easily have rolled off the veranda on to the grass during his excitement at the time of the row, and somebody may have picked it up,—either among the ranchmen or among the troopers."

"I hate to think that any of our men would take it," said the colonel, after a pause.

"I do not think any of them would, with the idea of selling it," said Stryker; "but here is a case where it was picked up, possibly, as one of the spoils of war. I have had inquiry made throughout the troop, but with no result so far. Do you go down again to-night, doctor?"

"Not if I can avoid it. I am going now to try and sleep, and will not ride down till daybreak unless signalled for. Good-night, colonel; good-night, all."

Unless signalled for! Instinctively Perry edged closer to Lawrence, who had stood a silent listener to the conversation, and Lawrence turned and saw him and knew the thought that must be uppermost in his mind. Others, too, were doubtless struck by the doctor's closing words, and were pondering over their full significance. There was a moment of perfect silence, and then Lawrence spoke:

"Does anybody know what the signal is?"

"Certainly," said Colonel Brainard, promptly. "He has explained the whole thing to me. Those were signals for him that we saw the night you were all on my gallery. It was an arrangement devised by their old nurse,—she who came up with the carriage for Miss Maitland the other day. She had a regular old-fashioned head-light and reflector, and, when Mr. Maitland was so ill as to need a doctor, used to notify Quin in that way. He sometimes failed to see it, and I have given orders to-day that the guard should wake him when it is seen hereafter."

"Then *that* was what those mysterious night lights meant that we have heard so much about during the last three weeks?" asked Mr. Dana.

"Certainly," answered Brainard. "What on earth did anybody suppose they meant?"

To this there was no response for a moment. Then Lawrence burst out laughing.

XVI.

Late that night Mr. Perry left his quarters and strolled out on the walk that bounded the parade. He could not sleep; he was feverishly impatient for the coming of another day, that he might start forth on his ride to Dunraven. Few as were the words in which Dr. Quin had conveyed the message of invitation, they were sufficient to set his heart athrob and his pulses bounding with eagerness and delight. Then, too, the annihilation of one portion, at least, of the "mystery" that surrounded the doctor's night visits to Dunraven, the utterly matter-of-fact way in which the colonel had shattered that story by his announcement, and the kind and friendly tone in which the doctor had spoken to him, all had served to bring about a revulsion of feeling and to remove a great portion of the weight of suspicion and dread with which he had been burdened. He and Lawrence had walked home together, the captain ever and anon bursting into renewed peals of laughter over the utterly absurd *dénouement* so recently presented to their view. The colonel and the officers with him had, of course, asked the cause of his sudden and apparently unaccountable merriment, and, when he could sufficiently control himself, Lawrence had begged the indulgence of his post commander, saying it involved a long story,—a garrison yarn, in fact,—and one he could hardly retail just then; but, said he, "it reminds me of something we studied in our school-boy days,—'*parturiunt montes*,' and '*nascitur ridiculus mus*.' Of course I'll feel bound to tell you the facts, colonel, but I want to ask a question or two first. The story is a relic of your predecessor's, sir, and, if I haven't got a big joke on the Eleventh, may I be transferred to them forthwith." And the captain's laughter broke forth again.

But he was in more serious mood when he reached his gate and turned to say good-night to Perry:

"It all goes to show what infernal gossip can spring up out of next to nothing, Perry, and I hope you'll try and forget that Mrs. Lawrence's curiosity or womanly weakness got the better of her that night at the colonel's. It will be a lesson to her,—if people ever do profit by lessons in such matters," he added, with rather a rueful smile.

And then, though he had gone home with lighter heart and ashamed of his jealous suspicions, Perry could not sleep. There were still some things in Quin's relations with the Maitlands that required explanation and that gave him cause for painful reflection. The morrow might unravel it all and give him glad relief from every dread; but would the morrow never come?

He heard the sentries at the storehouses calling half-past eleven, and, throwing aside his pipe, he impulsively hurried out into the open air. A "spin" around the parade or out on the starlit prairie might soothe his nerves and enable him to sleep.

All lights were out in the quadrangle, save those at the guard-house. Even at Belknap's quarters, where the veranda had been thronged with officers and ladies only an hour before, all was now silence and darkness. Unwilling to attract attention by tramping up and down on the board walk, he crossed the road and went out on the broad level of the

parade, but took care so to direct his steps as not to come within hailing-distance of the guard-house. It would be awkward work explaining the situation to the sergeant of the guard in case the sentry were to see or hear and challenge him. Then, too, Graham was officer of the guard, and Graham would be sure to chaff him mercilessly at the mess-table about this entirely new trait of night-prowling. Giving heed to all this, he edged well over to his left as he walked, and so it happened that he found himself, after a while, opposite the northeast entrance to the post, and close to the road on which stood the commissary and quartermaster storehouses. There was a sentry posted here, too, and it would not do to be challenged by him, any more than by "Number One."

Stopping a moment to listen for the sentry's foot-fall, Perry's ear was attracted by the sound of a door slowly and cautiously opened. It was some little time before he could tell from which one of the neighboring buildings, looming there in the darkness, the sound proceeded. Then he heard muffled footsteps and a whispered consultation not far away, and, hurrying on tiptoe in the direction of the sound, he presently caught sight of two or three dim, shadowy forms moving noiselessly along the porch of the company quarters nearest him. Stryker's troop —that to which he belonged—was quartered down beyond the guard-house on the lower side of the parade; these forms were issuing from the barracks of Captain Wayne's troop, and before Perry could realize the fact that they were out, either in moccasins or their stocking-feet, and presumably, therefore, on some unlawful enterprise, they had disappeared around the corner of the building. He walked rapidly thither, turned the corner, and they were nowhere in sight or hearing. Stopping to listen did not help matters at all. He could not hear a sound; and as for the shadows of which he was in pursuit, it was simply impossible to tell which direction they had taken. They had vanished from the face of the earth, and were lost in the deeper gloom that hung about the scattered array of wooden buildings—storehouses, fuel-sheds, and cook-sheds—at the rear of the post.

Had it been his own troop he could have roused the first sergeant and ordered a "check" roll-call as a means of determining at once who the night-prowlers might be; but Captain Wayne had his peculiarities, and one of them was an unalterable and deeply-rooted objection to any interference on the part of other officers in the management of his men. Perry's first thought, too, was of the stables and Sergeant Gwynne. Were they meditating another foray, and had the feeling spread outside their own company? No time was to be lost. He turned his face eastward to where the dark outlines of the stables could be dimly traced against the sky, and hastened, stumbling at times over stray tin cans and other discarded rubbish, until he crossed the intervening swale and reached the low bluff along which the crude, unpainted structures were ranged. All was darkness here towards the northern end, and the one sentry who had external charge of the entire line was slowly pacing his post: Perry could see his form, dimly outlined, as he breasted the slope, and it determined him to keep on in the hollow until he got to a point opposite the stables of his own troop. If there was to be any devil-

ment it might be well to see whether this soldier, too, would turn out to be in league with the conspirators. Listening intently as he hurried along, but hearing nothing, Perry soon found himself at the pathway leading to his own domain, and the next minute was gazing in surprise at a light burning dimly in the window of the little room occupied by Sergeant Gwynne: there was not a glimmer elsewhere along the line.

Striding up to the window, he tapped lightly, and Gwynne's voice sternly challenged from within, "Who's there?"

"Lieutenant Perry, sergeant. Come around and open the stable door for me."

"One moment, sir," was the answer, and he heard the sergeant bounding, apparently, off his bed. Then a hand drew aside the shade, and Gwynne's face appeared at the window, while a small lantern was held so as to throw its rays on the face without. "All right, sir," he continued. "I thought I could not be deceived in the voice."

Perry walked around to the front again, taking another survey of the sleeping garrison as he did so, and listening once more for footsteps; but all was still. Presently the little panel in the big door was unlocked from within, and the lieutenant bent low and entered, finding Gwynne, lantern in hand, standing in his uncompromising attitude of "attention" at the entrance.

"Everything been quiet here to-night?" he asked, as he straightened up.

"Perfectly so, sir."

"Come into your room a moment; I want to speak to you," said Perry, after a moment's reflection.

They passed along the broad gangway between the rows of sleepy horses, some lying down in their stalls, others still afoot and munching at their hay. The stable-guard stood at his post and faced them as they turned into the dark and narrow passage leading into Gwynne's little sanctuary. The lamps along the line of stalls burned low and dim, and, the ports being lowered, gave no gleam without the walls. Once more, however, a bright light shone from the window of the stable-sergeant's room,—brighter than before, could they only know it, for this time there was no intervening shade. After his brief inspection of the lieutenant's face, Gwynne had left it drawn.

The sergeant set his lantern on a wooden desk, and respectfully waited for his superior to speak. Perry looked him well over a moment, and then began:

"Did you tell Captain Stryker the particulars of your rough treatment down there at the ranch?"

"The rough treatment,—yes, sir."

"Would you mind telling me where you were taken?—where you saw Dr. Quin?"

The sergeant hesitated one moment, a troubled look on his face. His one available eye studied his lieutenant's features attentively. Something in the frank, kind blue eyes—possibly some sudden recollection, too—seemed to reassure him.

"It was to Mr. Cowan's little house, sir. He interposed to save me from a worse beating at the hands of three brutes who were em-

ployed there and had some grudge against this garrison of which I was ignorant. They attacked me without a word of warning. It was he, too, who called in Dr. Quin."

"Have you—did you see any of the people at Dunraven besides this young man?"

"I saw his mother, sir. She is a nurse there, and has been in the family for years, I am told."

Perry was silent a moment. Then he spoke again:

"Have you heard any further threats among the men here since the arrest of Sergeant Leary?"

Gwynne hesitated, coloring painfully:

"It is something I hate to speak of, sir. The talk has not alarmed me in the least."

"I know that, sergeant. All the same we want to prevent a recurrence of that performance; and it was that, mainly, that brought me over here. I saw some men stealing out of M Troop's quarters awhile ago, and lost them in the darkness. I thought they might be coming over here, and—got here first."

Gwynne's face lighted up. It touched him to know his officers were on the lookout for his safety.

"I have heard nothing, sir. The men would hardly be apt to speak to me on the subject, since the affair of the other night. What I fear is simply this,—that there is an element here in the regiment that is determined to get down there to the ranch and have satisfaction for the assault that was made on you and your party. They need horses in order to get there and back between midnight and reveille, and are doubtless hatching some plan. They failed here; now they may try the stables of some other troop, or the quartermaster's. Shall I warn the sentry that there are prowlers out to-night?"

"Not yet. They will hardly make the attempt while your light is burning here. What I'm concerned about just now is this: we all know that there is deep sympathy for Leary in the command, and it is not improbable that among the Irishmen there is corresponding feeling against you. I don't like your being here alone just now; for they know you are almost the only witness against him."

"I have thought of that, sir," answered Gwynne, gravely, "but I want nothing that looks like protection. The captain has spoken of the matter to me, and he agreed, sir, that it would do more harm than good. There is one thing I would ask,—if I may trouble the lieutenant."

"What is it, sergeant?"

"I have a little packet, containing some papers and a trinket or two, that I would like very much to have kept safely, and, if anything should happen to me, to have you, sir, and Captain Stryker open it, and—the letters there will explain everything that is to be done."

"Certainly. I will take care of it for you,—if not too valuable."

"I would rather know it was with you, sir, than stow it in the quartermaster's safe," was Gwynne's answer, as he opened a little wooden chest at the foot of his bunk, and, after rummaging a moment, drew forth a parcel tied and sealed. This he handed to the lieutenant.

"Now I will go back and notify the officer of the guard of what I have seen," said Perry; "and I want Nolan, saddled, over at my quarters right after morning stables. Will you see to it?"

"I will, sir, and thank you for your kindness."

All was darkness, all silence and peace, as Perry retraced his steps and went back to the garrison, carrying the little packet in his hand. He went direct to the guard-house, and found Mr. Graham sulky over being disturbed in his snooze by the sentry's challenge.

"What the devil are you owling around this time of night for?" was the not unnatural question. "I thought it was the officer of the day, and nearly broke my neck in hurrying out here."

But Perry's brief recital of the fact that he had seen some men stealing out of the quarters of M Troop in their stocking-feet or moccasins put an end to Graham's complaints. Hastily summoning the sergeant of the guard, he started out to make the rounds of his sentries, while Perry carried his packet home, locked it in his desk, and then returned to the veranda to await developments.

Sergeant Gwynne, meantime, having lighted his young officer to the stable door, stood there a few moments, looking over the silent garrison and listening to the retreating footsteps. The sentry came pacing along the front of the stables, and brought his carbine down from the shoulder as he dimly sighted the tall figure, but, recognizing the stable-sergeant as he came nearer, the ready challenge died on his lips.

"I *thought* I heard somebody moving around down here, sergeant. It was you, then, was it?"

"I have been moving around,—inside,—but made no noise. Have you heard footsteps or voices?"

"Both, I thought; but it's as black as your hat on this beat to-night. I can't see my hand afore my face."

"Keep your ears open, then: there are men out from *one* of the quarters, at least, and no telling what they are up to. Who's in charge at the quartermaster's stables?"

"Sergeant Riley, of the infantry; some of the fellers were over having a little game with him before tattoo, and I heard him tell 'em to come again when they had more money to lose. He and his helper there were laughing at the way they cleaned out the cavalry when they were locking up at taps. The boys fetched over a bottle of whiskey with 'em."

"Who were they?"

"Oh, there was Flanagan and Murphy, of M Troop, and Corporal Donovan, and one or two others. *They* hadn't been drinkin'."

"But Riley had,—do you mean?"

"He was a little full; not much."

"Well, look alive now, Wicks. It's my advice to you that you watch that end of your post with all your eyes." And with this Sergeant Gwynne turned back into the stable, picked up his lantern, and returned to the little room in which he slept. A current of cool night-air, blowing in through the open casement, attracted his attention. Odd! He knew he had pulled aside the shade to scan the features of

the lieutenant when he tapped at the pane, but he could not recall having opened the sash. It swung on a hinge, and was fastened by a loosely-fitting bolt. Perhaps the rising wind had blown it in. He set his lamp down as before, closed the sash, and then closed and locked the lid of his chest. That, too, was open. Wicks, the sentry, well up to the north end of his post and close to the entrance of the quartermaster's corral, was bawling, "Half-past twelve o'clock, and a-all's well," when the light went out in Gwynne's little room, and all the line of stables was wrapped in darkness.

Perry fretted around the veranda until one o'clock, then sought his room. He was still too excited to sleep, and it seemed an interminable time before he dozed off. Then it seemed as though he could not have been in dream-land five minutes before a hand was laid upon his shoulder, shaking him vigorously, and a voice he well knew was exclaiming, in low but forcible tones,—

"Wake, lieutenant, wake! Every horse is gone from the quartermaster's corral. There must be twenty men gone down the valley. I've Nolan here for you at the gate."

In ten minutes Lieutenant Perry and Sergeant Gwynne were riding neck and neck out over the eastern prairie,—out towards the paling orient stars and the faintly-gleaming sky,—before them, several miles away, the dark and threatened walls of Dunraven, behind them the stir and excitement and bustle consequent upon a night alarm. The colonel, roused by Perry with the news, had ordered the instant sounding of the assembly, and the garrison was tumbling out for roll-call.

XVII.

At the head of a score of his own men, Captain Stryker rode forth some fifteen minutes later. His orders from Colonel Brainard were to go to Dunraven, and, if he found the marauders there, to arrest the entire party and bring them back to the post. From all that could be learned from hurried questioning of the sentries and the dazed, half-drunken sergeant at the corral, the troopers engaged in the raid must have selected a time when the sentry was walking towards the south end of his post to lift one of their number over the wall of the enclosure in which were kept the wagons and ambulances. This man had unbarred from within the gate leading eastward to the trail down which the "stock" was driven daily to water in the Monee. Riley admitted that "the boys" had left a bottle with him which he and his assistant had emptied before turning in, and so it happened that, unheard and unseen, the raiders had managed to slip out with the dozen horses that were kept there and had also taken six mules as "mounts" for those who could not find anything better. Eighteen men, apparently, were in the party, and the sentry on Number Three heard hoof-beats down towards the valley about half-past two o'clock, but thought it was only some of the ponies belonging to the Cheyenne scouts. There was one comfort,—the men had taken no fire-arms with them; for a hurried inspection of the company quarters showed that the carbines were all in their racks and the revolvers in their cases. Some of the men might

have small-calibre pistols of their own, but the government arms had not been disturbed. Half the party, at least, must have ridden bare-back and with only watering-bridles for their steeds. They were indeed "spoiling for a fight," and the result of the roll-call showed that the missing troopers were all Irishmen and some of the best and most popular men in the command. Whatever their plan, thought Stryker, as he trotted down to the Monee, it was probably carried out by this time: it was now within a minute of four o'clock.

Only a mile out he was overtaken by Dr. Quin, who reined up an instant to ask if any one had been sent ahead. "Thank God for that!" he exclaimed, when told that Perry and Sergeant Gwynne had gone at the first alarm; then, striking spurs to his horse, pushed on at rapid gallop, while the troopers maintained their steady trot. A mile from Dunraven, in the dim light of early morning the captain's keen eyes caught sight of shadowy forms of mounted men on the opposite shore, and, despite their efforts to escape on their wearied steeds, three of them were speedily run down and captured. One of them was Corporal Donovan, and Donovan's face was white and his manner agitated. Bidding him ride alongside as they pushed ahead towards the ranch, Stryker questioned him as to what had taken place, and the corporal never sought to equivocate:

"We've been trying for several nights, sir, to get horses and go down and have it out with those blackguards at the ranch. We took no arms, sir, even those of us who had pistols of our own. All we asked was a fair fight, man against man. They wouldn't come out of their hole,—they *dasn't* do it, sir,—and then they fired on us. We'd have burned the roof over their heads, but that Lieutenant Perry galloped in and stopped us. I came away then, sir, and so did most of us. We knew 'twas all up when we saw the lieutenant; but there was more firing after I left. This way, captain. Out across the prairie here. We cut down the fence on this side." And, so saying, Donovan led the little troop to a broad gap in the wire barrier, and thence straight across the fields to where lights were seen flitting about in the dark shadows of the buildings of the ranch. Another moment, and Stryker had dismounted and was kneeling beside the prostrate and unconscious form of his lieutenant. Some misguided ranchman, mistaking for a new assailant the tall young soldier who galloped into the midst of the swarm of taunting Irishmen, had fired the cruel shot. There lay Nolan dead upon the sward, and here, close at hand, his grief-stricken master had finally swooned from loss of blood, the bullet having pierced his leg below the knee. Beside him knelt the doctor: he had cut away the natty riding-boot, and was rapidly binding up the wound. Close at hand stood Gwynne, a world of anxiety and trouble in his bruised and still discolored face. Grouped around were some of the assailing party, crestfallen and dismayed at the unlooked-for result of their foray, but ashamed to attempt to ride away, now that their favorite young officer was sore stricken as a result of their mad folly. Mr. Ewen, too, had come out, and was bustling about, giving directions to the one or two of his hands who had ventured forth from the office building. The big frame house under whose walls the group was

gathered was evidently used as a dormitory for a number of men, and this had been the objective point of the attack, but not a soul had issued from its portals: the occupants were the men who made the assault on Perry the night of his first visit, and now they deemed it best to keep within. Everything indicated that Perry had got to the scene just in time to prevent a bloody and desperate fracas, for the few ranch-people who appeared were still quivering with excitement and dread. Ewen was almost too much agitated to speak:

"Go to Mr. Maitland as soon as you can, doctor: this has given him a fearful shaking up. Mrs. Cowan is having a room made ready for Mr. Perry. Ah! here's young Cowan now.—Ready?" he asked.

"All ready. Mother says carry the gentleman right in.—She wants you to come too," he added, in lower tone, to Sergeant Gwynne, but the latter made no reply.

And so, borne in the arms of several of his men, Lieutenant Perry was carried across the intervening space and into the main building. When he recovered consciousness, as the morning light came through the eastern windows, he found himself lying in a white-curtained bed in a strange room, with a strange yet kind and motherly face bending over him, and his captain smiling down into his wondering eyes.

"You are coming round all right, old fellow," he heard Stryker say. "I'll call the doctor now: he wanted to see you as soon as you waked."

And then Quin came in and said a few cheery words and bade him lie still and worry about nothing. The row was over, thanks to him, and he and poor Nolan were the only victims; but it had been a great shock to Mr. Maitland and rendered his condition critical.

Perry listened in silence, asking no questions. For the time being he could think of nothing but Nolan's loss. It was such a cruel fate to be killed by those he came to save.

All that day he lay there, dozing and thinking alternately. He wondered at the tenderness and devotion with which the kind old Englishwoman nursed him and seemed to anticipate his every want. Quin came in towards evening and dressed his wound, which now began to be feverish and painful. He heard his colonel's voice in the hall-way, too, and heard him say to the doctor that somebody at Rossiter was eager to come down and take care of him. "Bosh!" said the blunt surgeon; "I've a far better nurse here,—and a reserve to fall back upon that will be worth a new life to him." And, weak and feverish though he was, Perry's heart thrilled within him: he wondered if it *could* mean Gladys. Two days more he lay there, the fever skilfully controlled by the doctor's ministrations, and the pain of his wound subdued by Mrs. Cowan's cooling bandages and applications. But there was a burning fever in his heart that utterly refused to down. He strained his ears listening for the sound of her voice or the pit-a-pat of her foot-fall in the corridor. At last he mustered courage and asked for her, and Mrs. Cowan smiled:

"Miss Maitland has been here three times to inquire how you were; but it was while you were sleeping, Mr. Perry, and she rarely leaves her father's bedside. He is very ill, and seems to be growing

weaker every day. I don't know what we would have done if we had not found Dr. Quin here: he has pulled him through two or three bad seizures during the past year."

"Where had you known the doctor before?" asked Perry, with an eager light in his eyes.

"Nowhere; but it was as though one of his own kith and kin had suddenly appeared here to welcome Mr. Maitland. The doctor is a first-cousin of Mrs. Maitland's: she was from Ireland, and it was from her family that the ranch was named. Lord Dunraven is of the peerage of Ireland, you know," added Mrs. Cowan, with the cheerful confidence of the Englishwoman that every person of any education or standing must be familiar with the pages of Debrett.

"How should I know anything about it?" laughed Perry. He felt in merry mood; another page in his volume of suspicion and dread was being torn away, and Quin's relations with the household were turning out to be such as made him an object of lively interest, not of jealous doubt.

Then came callers from the garrison. It seemed as though all of a sudden the blockade had been raised and that no people were so warmly welcomed at Dunraven as the very ones who had been especially proscribed. Mr. Maitland, weak and ill as he was, had asked to be allowed to see Colonel Brainard on the occasion of that officer's second visit; Stryker, Dana, Graham, and Parke had all been allowed to come up and see Perry a few moments, but Mrs. Cowan was vigilant and remorseless, would allow them only a brief interview, and, with smiling determination, checked her patient when he attempted to talk. The third day of his imprisonment Dr. Quin came scowling in along in the afternoon, manifestly annoyed about something, and said a few words in a low tone to Mrs. Cowan, and that usually equable matron fluttered away down-stairs in evident excitement.

"It's Mrs. Belknap," explained the doctor, in answer to Perry's inquiring look. "She has ridden down here with Dana and sent her card up to Gladys,—who can't bear the sight of her; I don't know why; intuition, I suppose."

Presently Mrs. Cowan reappeared: "Miss Gladys has asked to be excused, as she does not wish to leave her father at this moment; and the lady would like to come up and see Mr. Perry."

"Tell her *no!*" said Quin, savagely. "No,—here: I'll go myself." And down went the doughty medical officer, and straightway the rumbling tones of his harsh voice were heard below: the words were indistinguishable, but Mrs. Cowan's face indicated that there was something in the sound that gave her comfort. She stood at the window watching the pair as they rode away.

"Miss Gladys shuddered when she had to shake hands with her that day when we came away from Mrs. Sprague's," said she. "I hope that lady is not a particular friend of yours, Mr. Perry?"

"We have been very good friends indeed," said he, loyally. "To be sure, I have hardly known Mrs. Belknap a month, but both she and the captain have been very kind to me." All the same, down in the bottom of his heart he did not wonder at Miss Maitland's sensa-

tions. He was beginning to despair of ever seeing her, and yet could get no explanation that satisfied him.

"You know she can walk only with great pain and difficulty even now," said Mrs. Cowan. "Her ankle was very badly wrenched, and she hardly goes farther than from her own to her father's room. You ought to feel complimented that she has been here to your door three times."

"I feel more like butting my brains out for being asleep," muttered Perry in reply. "I wish you would wake me next time, Mrs. Cowan. I shan't believe it until I see it, or hear her voice at the door."

She had excused herself to Mrs. Belknap, and the doctor had denied that lovely woman her request to be allowed to come up and see Mr. Perry; and yet, the very next day, when the big four-mule ambulance from Rossiter came driving up to the front door, and Mrs. Sprague and Mrs. Lawrence, escorted by the colonel and Captain Stryker, appeared on the veranda, how did it happen that the ladies were speedily ushered up-stairs to Miss Maitland's own room, and that, after an animated though low-toned chat of half an hour with her, they were marshalled down the long corridor by Mrs. Cowan in person, and, to Perry's huge delight, were shown in to his bedside? It looked as though Quin were showing unwarrantable discrimination. Stryker and the colonel, too, came in to see him, and the latter told him that both Mr. Maitland and Mr. Ewen had begged that the arrested soldiers might not be punished. Including Sergeant Leary and Kelly, there were now twenty men under charges more or less grave in their character, and he had asked that a general court-martial be convened for their trial. The colonel deeply appreciated the feeling displayed by the stricken proprietor and his overseer; he was touched that even in his extreme illness and prostration Mr. Maitland should intercede for the men who had made so hostile an invasion of his premises and brought upon the inmates of Dunraven a night of dread and anxiety; but discipline had to be maintained, he replied, and the ringleaders in the move had been guilty of a flagrant breach which could not be overlooked.

But on the following day—the fourth of Perry's stay—the doctor came down with a face full of gloom and distress. Both nurse and patient noted it, and inquired the cause. For a time Quin avoided any direct reply: "something had ruffled him up at the post," he answered: "can't tell you about it now. I'll do it by and by. I want to think." He examined Perry's leg, dressed and rebandaged the wound, and then went back to Mr. Maitland's room. They could hear his voice in the hall after a while, and Perry's heart began to throb heavily: he was sure the low, sweet tones, almost inaudible, that came floating along the corridor, were those of Gladys. When Mrs. Cowan spoke to him on some ordinary topic, he impatiently bade her hush,—he could not bear to be disturbed,—and, far from being hurt at his petulance, Mrs. Cowan smiled softly as she turned away.

Then Quin came back, and, after fidgeting around a moment, abruptly addressed his patient:

"Perry, do you remember that morning you rode down here right after reveille and met me on the trail,—or at least would have met me if I hadn't dodged and gone over to the other side of the valley?"

"Certainly I do, doctor."

"I may as well explain that singular performance first. You may have heard that I didn't get along amicably with your predecessors of the Eleventh. Their colonel was ass enough to totally misconstrue the purpose of my visits here, and I was ass enough to make no explanation. The Maitlands went away; I was not called for again while the Eleventh remained; and therefore I said no more about it. Mr. Maitland returned unexpectedly soon after you came, and the first I knew of it was the signal-lights telling me he was there, ill, and that I was wanted. It was the night of the colonel's dinner-party. I couldn't explain then, and decided to go at once and explain afterwards. When I met you all of a sudden the next morning, the first impulse was to get away out of your sight, and I obeyed it simply because of the unpleasant experiences I had been having with your fellow-cavalrymen. I did not want to have to answer questions. See? I was ashamed of it, but too late to turn back."

Perry nodded. "I understand it—now," he said.

"Well, what I want to ask is about Sergeant Gwynne. Did you meet him before you got back?"

"Yes,—a mile or so out from the post."

"You stopped and talked with him, didn't you?"

"Yes,—for several minutes."

Mrs. Cowan's needle-work had fallen in her lap. She was seated near the window, and had been busily sewing. Now she was looking up, eager and intent.

"You've known him a long time, haven't you?"

"Yes,—ever since he joined. He's one of the best sergeants I ever knew."

"You would hardly think him guilty of any dishonesty, would you?"

Mrs. Cowan was rising from her chair; the needle-work had fallen to the floor.

"Dishonesty! Not by a—good deal!" was the reply that bade fair to be even more impulsive, and was checked only in deference to the presence of a woman.

"Well, neither would I, from what I've seen of him; and yet Mr. Maitland's seal ring was found on him last night."

"My God! Of course he could explain it in some way?"

"He couldn't,—or wouldn't. He simply stood there, white as a sheet except where those bruises made him green and blue. He had denied the charge flatly when accused; and yet there it was in his chest. I never saw any man so taken aback as Captain Stryker: he said he would have sworn to his innocence."

"So would I!—so I do, by Jupiter! It's some foul plot!—it's——"

But he got no further. To his own amaze, to the utter bewilderment of Dr. Quin, Mrs. Cowan precipitated herself upon her patient, seized the hand that lay nearest her on the coverlet, and burst forth into half-articulate, sobbing, indignant words, mingled with kisses showered passionately on that astonished hand.

"Oh, bless him for the words! Oh, God bless you, Mr. Perry! . . . Oh, the fools! the lunatics! . . . A thief, indeed! . . . The idea of *his* being accused! . . . Oh, God! what would his mother in heaven say to this? . . . As though he had not borne far too much already! . . . It's his own—his *own* ring, I tell you! Who else should wear it? . . . Who dare take it from him now? . . . Oh, the infamy of it all!"

In her wild excitement, in her incoherent praise and lamentation and wrath and indignation, her voice, her sobs, rang through the room and out along the broad corridor. Even in their amaze the two men heard a hurried step approaching, a limping, halting, painful step, yet rapid and impulsive. Quin, absorbed in his contemplation of the excited woman, paid no attention; Perry's eager eyes were strained upon the door-way, where, the very next instant, with pallid features and startled mien, Gladys Maitland suddenly appeared and stood staring in upon the spectacle of Mrs. Cowan kissing and sobbing over Perry's hand. Already he had divined the truth, and strove to warn the tear-blinded woman of her presence; but Mrs. Cowan's excitement had increased to the verge of hysteria: she was laughing and crying now by turns, blessing her soldier patient for his faith in the accused sergeant, and then breaking forth anew in indignant expletive, "Who are his accusers? Who dare say thief to him? . . . Not one is fit to look him in the face! 'Twas the very ring his mother gave him, . . . his own! his own!"

And then the doctor seized her and turned her so that she must see Gladys,—Gladys, wild-eyed, panting, staring, tottering forward from the door-way. One sharp cry from the woman's lips, one spring towards the reeling form, and she had caught the girl in her arms:

"Gladys, Gladys, my little pet! my own baby girl! Look up and thank God! I've tried to keep my promise and his secret until he released me. I've tried hard, but it's all useless: I can't, I can't. Oh, Gladys, sweetheart, your mother's smiling down on us this day. Who do you think has come back to us, safe and strong and well and brave? Who but your own brother, your own Archie, Gladys?"

XVIII.

"Yes, certainly very pretty,—now. It's such a pity that Englishwomen grow coarse and stout and red-faced so very soon after they are married." The speaker was Mrs. Belknap, and her soft voice was tuned to a pitch of almost pathetic regret. They were talking of Miss Maitland, who had just been assisted to her saddle by the colonel, and now, followed by the faithful Griggs and escorted by Captain Stryker, was riding away homeward after a brief call at the post. Fort Rossiter, once so humdrum and placid and "stupid," as the ladies termed it, had been the vortex of sensations for a whole fortnight, and one excitement had trodden on the heels of another with such rapidity that people were growing weary.

Perhaps the happiest man in garrison was Captain Stryker: he had refused to believe in the guilt of Sergeant Gwynne when Captain Wayne came to him to say that there were men in his troop who openly accused

the sergeant of having that cherished seal-ring secreted in his chest. So confident was he that he had gone with the captain and Mr. Farnham to the stables and there told Gwynne of the charge against him. Gwynne flushed hotly, denied the truth of the story, but hesitated when asked if he would allow his chest to be searched. This was quickly noted by Wayne and Farnham, and the search was insisted upon. Gwynne then said there were a few items in that chest which he allowed no one to see; he pledged his soldier word that they were nothing but a paper or two, some little photographs, and a book. These he asked permission to remove first; then they might search. But Wayne sternly refused. The sergeant turned very white, set his lips, and hesitated still, until his own captain spoke; then he surrendered his key. Wayne and Farnham bent over the chest while the troop first sergeant rapidly turned over the clothing, books, etc., with trembling hands. There was a little compartment at one side, in which were lying some small items,—a pocket-compass, a pencil-case, some keys, a locket and a neck-chain, and, among these, something wrapped in tissue-paper. This was handed to Captain Wayne, who unrolled the paper, and—there was a massive seal-ring. A crest was cut in the stone, and, taking it to the light, Wayne was able to make out the motto,—"*Quod sursum volo videre.*" It was the ring Maitland had lost.

Stryker looked wonderingly at his sergeant, who stood there as though petrified with amaze and consternation, pale as death, and unable to say a word. Asked to explain the matter, he could only shake his head, and, after a while, hoarsely mutter, "I know nothing about it. I never placed it there."

"Do you mean to tell me you never saw it before?" asked Wayne, sternly. And Gwynne was silent.

"Is this the first time you ever saw it, I say?" repeated the captain, angrily.

"No, sir: I *have* seen it before," was the answer.

"Then you must have known 'twas stolen, and you have connived at its concealment," was Wayne's triumphant conclusion; and on the report of his officers Colonel Brainard had no alternative but to order Gwynne's close arrest. Only Stryker's appeal and guarantee saved the sergeant from confinement in the guard-house.

The next sensation was the sight of Dr. Quin galloping back to the post like mad and bolting unceremoniously into the colonel's gate. Then Stryker was sent for, and the three officers held an excited conversation. Then the orderly went at a run over to the quarters, and in five minutes Sergeant Gwynne, erect as ever and dressed with scrupulous care, looking anything but like a guilty man, was seen crossing the parade towards his colonel's house. The men swarmed out on the porches as the tidings went from lip to lip, and some of the Irish troopers in Wayne's company were remarked as being oddly excited. Just what took place during that interview none could tell, but in ten minutes the news was flying around the garrison that Sergeant Gwynne was released from arrest, and in less than half an hour, to the wonderment of everybody, he was seen riding away towards Dunraven with Dr. Quin, and for two days more did not reappear at Rossiter.

But when the story flashed from house to house about the garrison that Sergeant Gwynne was not Sergeant Gwynne at all, but Mr. Archibald Wyndham Quin Maitland, late of Her Majesty's —th Lancers, and only surviving son of the invalid owner of Dunraven Ranch and other valuable properties, the amaze amounted to almost stupefaction. It was known that old Mr. Maitland was lying desperately weak and ill the day that Quin the doctor came riding back. All manner of stories were told regarding the affecting nature of the interview in which the long-lost son was restored to his overjoyed father, but, like most stories, they were purely the offspring of imagination, for at that interview only three were present: Gladys led her brother to the room and closed the door, while good Mrs. Cowan stood weeping for joy down the long corridor, and Dr. Quin blinked his eyes and fussed and fidgeted and strode around Perry's room with his hands in his pockets, exploding every now and then into sudden comment on the romantic nature of the situation and the idiocy of some people there at Rossiter. "Joy does not kill," he said: "Maitland would have been a dead man by the end of the week, but for this: it will give him a new lease of life."

And it did. Though the flame was feeble and flickering, it was fanned by a joy unutterable. The boy whom the stricken father believed his stubborn pride and condemnation had driven to despair and suicide was restored to him in the prime of manly strength, all tenderness, all forgiveness, and Maitland's whole heart went up in thanksgiving. He begged that Brainard and Stryker would come to him, that he might thank them for their faith in his son; he bade the doctor say to Perry that the moment he could be lifted from his bed he would come to clasp his hand and bless him for being a far better friend to his son than he had been a father.

The sergeant's return to the post was the signal for a general turnout on the part of the men, all of whom were curious to see how he would appear now that his identity was established. Of course his late assailants could not join in the crowd that thronged about him, but they listened with eagerness to everything that was told. "He was just the same as ever," said all accounts. He had never been intimate with any of them, but always friendly and kind. One thing went the rounds like lightning.

"You'll be getting your discharge now, sergeant," said Mrs. Reed, the voluble wife of the leader of the band, "and taking up your residence at the ranch, I suppose. Of course the British minister can get it for you in a minute."

"Not a bit of it, Mrs. Reed," was the laughing answer. "I enlisted to serve Uncle Sam five years, and he's been too good a friend to me to turn from. I shall serve out my time with the —th."

And the sergeant was true to his word. If old Maitland could have prevailed, an application for his son's discharge would have gone to Washington; but this the soldier positively forbade. He had eight months still to serve, and he meant to carry out his contract to the letter. Stryker offered him a furlough, and Gwynne thankfully took a week, that he might be by his father's side and help nurse him to

better health. "By that time, too, the garrison will have grown a little more accustomed to it, sir, and I will have less embarrassment in going on with my work."

Two days before his return to duty there came a modified sensation in the shape of the report that a trooper of Wayne's company had deserted. He was a man who had borne a bad reputation as a turbulent, mischief-making fellow, and when Sergeant Leary heard of his going he was in a state of wild excitement. He begged to be allowed to see his captain, and to him he confessed that one of his little party of three had seen the ring drop from Mr. Maitland's finger the night of the first visit to Dunraven, had managed to pick it up and carry it away in the confusion, and had shown it to his friend in Wayne's troop when they got back. The latter persuaded him to let him take it, as the lockers of the men who were at Dunraven were sure, he said, to be searched. It was known that he had a grudge against Gwynne; he was one of the men who *was* to have gone to the ranch the night they purposed riding down and challenging the Englishmen to come out and fight, but had unaccountably failed at the last moment. They believed that *he* had chosen that night to hide the ring in the sergeant's chest: he could easily have entered through the window. And this explanation—the only one ever made—became at once accepted as the true one throughout the garrison.

During the week of his furlough the sergeant found time to spend many hours by the bedside of Lieutenant Perry, who was rapidly recovering, and who by the end of the week had been lifted into an easy invalid-chair and wheeled in to see Mr. Maitland. When *not* with Mr. Perry, the young trooper's tongue was ever wagging in his praise. He knew many a fine officer and gallant gentleman in the service of the old country, he said, and he admired many a captain and subaltern in that of his adopted land, but the first one to whom he "warmed"—the first one to win his affection—was the young cavalryman who had met his painful wound in their defence. Old Maitland listened to it all eagerly,—he had already given orders that the finest thoroughbred at Dunraven should be Perry's the moment he was able to mount again,—and he was constantly revolving in mind how he could show his appreciation of the officers who had befriended his son. Mrs. Cowan, too, never tired of hearing Perry's praises, and eagerly questioned when the narrator flagged. There was another absorbed auditor, who never questioned, and who listened with downcast eyes. It was she who seldom came near Perry during his convalescence, she who startled and astonished the young fellow beyond measure, the day the ambulance came down to drive him back to the fort, by withdrawing the hand he had impulsively seized when at last she appeared to bid him adieu, and cutting short his eager words with "Mrs. Belknap will console you, I dare say," and abruptly leaving the room.

Poor Ned! In dire distress and perplexity he was driven back to Rossiter, and that very evening he did a most sensible and fortunate thing: he told Mrs. Sprague all about it; and, instead of condoling with him and bidding him strive to be patient and saying that all would come right in time, the little woman's kind eyes shone with de-

light, her cheeks flushed with genuine pleasure; she fairly sprang from her chair, and danced up and down and clapped her hands and laughed with glee, and then, when Perry ruefully asked her if that was the sympathy he had a right to expect from her, she only laughed the more, and at last broke forth with,—

"Oh, you great, stupid, silly boy! You ought to be wild with happiness. *Can't* you see she's jealous?"

And the very next day she had a long talk with Dr. Quin, whose visits to Dunraven still continued; and one bright afternoon when Gladys Maitland rode up to the fort to return calls, she managed to have quite a chat with her, despite the fact that Mrs. Belknap showed a strong desire to accompany that fair English girl in all three of her visits. In this effort, too, the diplomatic services of Captain Stryker proved rather too much for the beauty of the garrison. Was it possible that Mrs. Sprague had enlisted him also in the good cause? Certain it is that the dark-featured captain was Miss Maitland's escort as she left the garrison, and that it was with the consciousness of impending defeat that Mrs. Belknap gave utterance to the opening sentence of this chapter: Mr. Perry had distinctly avoided her ever since his return.

One lovely evening late in May Mr. Perry was taking his first ride on the new horse, a splendid bay, and a perfect match for Gladys Maitland's favorite mount. Already had this circumstance excited smiling comment in the garrison; but if the young man himself had noted the close resemblance it conveyed no blissful augury. Everybody remarked that he had lost much of his old buoyancy and life; and it must be confessed he was not looking either blithe or well. Parke had suggested riding with him,—an invitation which Perry treated so coldly that the junior stopped to think a moment, and began to see through the situation; and so Mr. Perry was suffered to set forth alone that evening, and no one was surprised when, after going out of the west gate as though bent on riding *up* the Monee, he was presently seen to have made the circuit of the post and was slowly cantering down towards the lower valley. Out on the eastern prairie another horseman could be seen; and presently the two came together. Colonel Brainard took down his binocular and gazed out after them.

"I declare," said he, "those two figures are so much alike I cannot tell which of them is Perry."

"Then the other is Sergeant Gwynne, colonel," said Stryker, quietly. "Put him in our uniform, and it would indeed be hard to tell the two figures apart. Mr. Maitland told me last week that that was what so startled and struck him the first time he saw Perry."

"How is Mr. Maitland now, do you know?"

"He gets no better. After the first week of joy and thanksgiving over his boy's restoration to him, the malady seemed to reassert itself. Dunraven will have a new master by winter, I fancy."

The colonel was silent a moment. Then he suddenly asked,—

"By the way, how was it that Gwynne *wasn't* drowned? I never understood that."

"He never meant to be," said Stryker. "He told Perry all about it. He was ruined, he thought, in his profession and his own country,

and he knew his father's inexorable pride: so he simply decided to put an end to Archie Maitland and start a new life for himself. He wrote his letters and arranged his property with that view, and called the steward to enable him to swear he was in his state-room after the steamer weighed anchor. Then in a jiffy he was over the side in the darkness; it was flood-tide, and he was an expert swimmer; he reached a coasting-vessel lying near; he had money, bought his passage to France, after a few days at Cape Town, and then came to America and enlisted. He got a confession out of one of the irregulars who was with him, Perry says, and that was one of the papers he was guarding so jealously. He had given others to Perry that very night."

"They seemed to take to each other like brothers from the start," said the colonel, with a quiet smile.

"Just about," answered Captain Stryker.

Meantime, Perry and Sergeant Gwynne have been riding slowly down the valley. Night has come upon Dunraven by the hour they reach the northern gate,—no longer closed against them,—and as they near the house Perry slowly dismounts. "I'll take the horses to the stable myself: I want to," says his trooper friend, and for the second time the young officer stands upon the veranda at the door-way, then holds his hand as he hears again the soft melody of the piano floating out upon the still night-air. Slowly and not without pain he walks around to the east front, striving to move with noiseless steps. At last he stands by the open casement, just where he had paused in surprise that night a month agone, and, slowly drawing aside one heavy fold of curtain, gazes longingly in at Gladys Maitland, seated there at the piano, just where he first saw her lovely face and form. Her fingers are wandering idly over the keys, playing little fragmentary snatches, —first one melody, then another; her sweet blue eyes are fixed on vacancy,—she sees nothing in that room, or near it; she is paler than when he first looked upon her, and there are traces of deep anxiety and of some hidden sorrow in the fair, fresh face. Presently, under the soft touch of her fingers, a sweet, familiar melody comes rippling forth. He remembers it instantly; it is the same he heard the night of his first visit,—that exquisite "Spring Song" of Mendelssohn's,—and he listens, spell-bound. All of a sudden the sweet strains are broken off, the music ceases; she has thrown herself forward, bowed her queenly head upon her arms, and, leaning over the key-board, her form is shaken by a storm of passionate tears. Perry hurls aside the sheltering curtain and limps rapidly across the soft and noiseless rug. She never dreams of his presence until, close at her side, a voice she has learned to know and know well—a voice tremulous with love, sympathy, and yearning—murmurs only her name, "Gladys," and, starting up, she looks one instant into his longing eyes.

Sergeant "Gwynne" Maitland, lifting the heavy *portière* a moment later, stops short at the entrance, gazes one second at the picturesque scene at the piano, drops the *portière*, and vanishes, unnoticed.

Things seem changed at Dunraven of late years. The —th are still at Rossiter; so is Lieutenant Perry. It may be the climate, or

association with an American sisterhood, or—who knows?—perhaps somebody has told her of Mrs. Belknap's prediction, but Mrs. Perry has not yet begun to grow coarse, red-faced, or stout. She is wonderfully popular with the ladies of the —th, and has found warm friends among them, but Mrs. Sprague of the infantry is the woman she particularly fancies, and her gruff old kinsman Dr. Quin is ever a welcome guest at their fireside. It was he, she told her husband long after, who undid the mischief Mrs. Belknap had been able to sow in one brief conversation. "I've known that young woman ever since she wore pinafores, Gladys. She has some good points, too, but her one idiosyncrasy is that every man she meets should bow down to and worship her. She is an Alexander in petticoats, sighing for new worlds to conquer, has been a coquette from the cradle, and—what she can't forgive in Ned Perry is that he simply did not fall in love with her as she thought he had."

Down at Dunraven the gates are gone, the doors are ever hospitably open. Ewen is still manager *de jure*, but young Mr. Maitland, the proprietor, is manager *de facto*, and, though there is constant going and coming between the fort and the ranch, and the officers of the —th ride in there at all hours, what makes the ranchman so popular among the rank and file is the fact that Sergeant "Gwynne," as they still call him, has a warm place in his heart for one and all, and every year when the date of his enlistment in the —th comes round he gives a barbecue dinner to the men, whereat there are feasting and drinking of healths and song and speech-making, and Leary and Donovan and even the recreant Kelly are apt to be boisterously prominent on such occasions, but blissfully so,—for there hasn't been a shindy of any kind since their old comrade stepped into his possessions at Dunraven Ranch.

THE END.

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING.

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING was born October 12, 1844, at Albany, New York. He comes of a family that is distinguished in literature and politics. His father, Rufus King, was for some years minister resident for the Pontifical States at Rome, and during the civil war became brigadier-general of volunteers. His grandfather, Charles King, LL.D., was president of Columbia College. His great-grandfather, Rufus King, was one of the signers of the Constitution, was long United States Senator from the State of New York, and was twice minister at the Court of St. James. On his mother's side Captain King is descended from the Indian apostle, John Eliot.

One year after the birth of his son, Mr. Rufus King resigned from the engineer corps of the army and removed to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to become editor and proprietor of the Milwaukee *Sentinel*. Thus it came about that Charles's boyhood was spent in the growing West and on the shores of Lake Michigan, where he still makes his home. In 1858 he was sent to New York City to be educated at the grammar-school of Columbia College by Dr. Charles Anthon, and in June, 1861, he passed his examination for the Freshman class in the college. But the Southern States had seceded; Fort Sumter had been fired upon; the civil war had begun. Within twenty-four hours after he had passed his examination, Charles King turned up in the camp of the Wisconsin volunteers at Washington, D.C., drum-sticks in hand.

He had been "marker" of the First Regiment of Wisconsin militia before going to New York, and a drummer in the Light Guard. For a few weeks he was busy teaching his fellow Badger boys the use of their drum-sticks, and then, at the organization of the Wisconsin brigade,—the command of which was tendered to his father,—the sixteen-year-old boy was made mounted orderly at brigade head-quarters.

In this capacity he saw his first real soldiering in Virginia. It was his great good fortune to be the guide of General Winfield S. Hancock the first time that gallant soldier crossed the Potomac at the head of his brigade. In October, 1861, with the promise of a cadet-ship at West Point from President Lincoln himself, Charles King began to take even a livelier interest in military affairs; and in June, 1862, he entered on his academic career. He is remembered by those who knew him at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York, as one who hated mathematics and devoted only so much of his active brain to the mastering of the exact sciences as was necessary to fulfil the absolute requirements of the institution. Nevertheless Charley King was a marked man from the day of his entrance as a "plebe," June, 1862, until his appointment to the coveted rank of cadet corporal the following year. In 1864 he was cadet first-sergeant of Company B, and he was appointed cadet adjutant in 1865. To those who did not know the commandants of the United States corps of cadets —Colonel Henry Clitz and Colonel Henry M. Black, the latter now

commanding the Twenty-Third Infantry, but then major of the Seventh Infantry—this succession of cadet military honors does not mean much. The appointments of cadet officers are made mainly by the commandant. King was made cadet corporal in 1863, because he gave promise of being a good soldier; his promotion in 1864 to the most coveted cadet military rank possible was proof that he *was* a good soldier; and this standard of military proficiency and personal bearing was further confirmed when he became a first-class man in 1865. Adjutant King had a way of carrying himself that attracted the attention of the ladies and excited the envy of his fellows and the approbation of the tactical officers. He gloried in the functions of his office. He was not spoiled by the blazing chevrons of his rank, and was popular with all the lower-classmen. His voice was clear as a bell. His clothes always fitted him. He was one of those fellows who, after a skirmish drill, in exercises in the riding-hall, on the plain, or in the laboratory, or building pontoon-bridges, or on mounted artillery drill, always looked as neat as a pin. He was a manly fellow, withal. To the fullest extent, he was a ringleader in any exploit not inconsistent with military duty: *there* he always stopped short. His instincts were military in the best sense of the term. The writer of these lines first knew him in 1864. I was a plebe then, and earth had few more miserable mortals than I during July and August of that year. The army officers on duty at the Military Academy had all gone through plebe camp, with its attendant bedevilments, and the tacit sentiment of the institution in those days was that it was all right for the yearlings and other upper-classmen to vex the plebes with bodily and mental labor, and harass and "yank" them by night, and, in general, to make them feel that there was nothing on earth, or in the sea, or in the air, that was not better than they. To such unfortunate ones a cheery word of kindly encouragement from a cadet officer was an oasis in a desert. King had a sunny temper and a wonderfully exhilarating way about him. He was liked personally and respected in his official capacity by the classes of 1868–69.

General Cullom's Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy shows graduate No. 2136 to have been Charles King. He was graduated number twenty-two in a class of forty-one members, number twenty-one being the lamented William Preston Dixon, who died on the 6th of October, 1866, from exhaustion consequent upon his efforts to save a woman in the wreck of the steamer Evening Star. Lieutenant King was kept back at the Military Academy, June to August, 1866, as artillery instructor,—a compliment extended only to those subaltern officers who, as cadets, have especially distinguished themselves by the practical demonstration of abilities as instructors in some tactical branch of the science of war.

From the fall of 1866 until January, 1869, Lieutenant King was attached to Light Battery K, First Artillery, serving at New Orleans, Louisiana. On the latter date he was transferred to Light Battery C, at Fort Hamilton, New York. He served a few weeks on recruiting-service at Cincinnati, Ohio, in the spring of 1869, but was ordered to West Point as Instructor in Cavalry Tactics, Artillery Tactics, and

Horsemanship. This was a rare compliment. Of the nine hundred and odd other subaltern officers of the army, eligible for such detail,—and a large majority desirous of it,—the assignment of Lieutenant King for a *second* tour of duty as a military instructor for the corps of cadets is a fact which speaks for itself. At the Military Academy he served as commandant of Company C. He was relieved from duty in October, 1871, in order to enable him to accept a staff position. He was transferred from First Artillery to Fifth Cavalry on December 31, 1871, and was assigned to K Troop. The troop had then left Fort D. A. Russell, Wyoming Territory, and was *en route* to Camp Hualpai, Arizona Territory, which station it reached February 15, 1872. The subject of this sketch did not accompany K Troop on this march, he having been selected by brevet Major-General William H. Emory as a personal aide-de-camp, and was also appointed acting judge advocate of the Department of the Gulf, with station at New Orleans, Louisiana. He retained the position of confidential aide from November, 1871, to February, 1874.

On April 7, 1872, the International race, gentlemen riders, was ridden on the old Metairie track under the auspices of the Metairie Jockey Club. England, Ireland, Austria, and France were represented. The challengers were Count Victor Crenneville, of the Austrian Hussars, and Captain George Rosenlecher, of France. At first no champion seemed available for the United States. But Lieutenant Charles King, returning to the city from a tour of inspection through Mississippi, heard of the unaccepted challenge open to the United States, and at once obtained General Emory's permission to take up the gauntlet. A great crowd was present on the day of the race, and the judges' stand was a beautiful sight. It was too soon after the war for a Yankee to have many friends among the fair ones of New Orleans, and, while the blue and gold bars of Captain Rosenlecher, the scarlet and white of the Austrian, the cherry-red and dark blue of Mr. Stuart, who rode for England, and the green of Ireland, were to be seen everywhere among the parasols or ribbons and colors of the ladies, not more than one or two had the courage to wear King's colors. He was attired in the colors of his old college,—Columbia,—sky-blue and white, and looked the gentleman rider to perfection. I have seen his photograph: a white silk jockey-cap, blue shirt, immaculate-fitting riding-breeches and boots, the latter weighing six ounces. King's weight was one hundred and forty-three pounds. It was a beautiful race. The "Yank" won it by just two horse-lengths. After the gold-mounted whip was presented to him from the judges' stand, and the other gentlemen had cordially congratulated the victor, he took his prize across the track and laid it in the lap of the young lady who had accompanied General and Mrs. Emory to the scene, and who wore the aide-de-camp's colors. She has that whip yet, and shakes it at him sometimes, but has never used it on their children. They were married the fall following.

Their honeymoon was spent in no little excitement, for the riots were in full blast in New Orleans that winter of 1872 and '73, and the aide-de-camp had full share in all the service. He was complimented by General Emory for coolness and gallantry. During the year 1872,

King's troop, K, Fifth Cavalry, was employed in alternate months of field-service, from its station, Camp Hualpai, Arizona Territory. In July, 1873, the troop left Camp Hualpai for Camp Verde, in Northern Arizona, a region so infested with hostile Apaches that incessant service in the field was necessary for all our troops. After facing unreconstructed rebels in turbulent New Orleans until the spring of 1874, King asked to be relieved from staff duty and to be ordered to join his troop. Reluctantly his application was acceded to. During his service in New Orleans King had every opportunity, without in any particular neglecting his military duties, of mingling with the most exclusive society in the city. He was eminently a society man, yet he seldom availed himself of this privilege. This subordination of his tendencies was due to the fact that he was proud of a uniform and a profession not especially honored in the Crescent City at that period. King was one of those army officers who would not in citizen's attire accept any hospitalities where he would not be equally welcome if clad in his uniform. Adherence to this principle debarred him from a good deal of social enjoyment in those days.

In the campaign against the Apaches in Arizona Territory (1874–76) the Fifth Cavalry, with King in command of his troop, was conspicuous above all the others. General Sherman publicly stated that he considered their services "unequalled by those of any cavalry regiment during our late Civil War." General Crook, the division commander, also singled out the Fifth Cavalry for especial praise in distributing commendations on the uniform bravery of the men and officers under his command.

In an engagement at Diamond Butte on May 25, 1874, King's gallantry won from President Grant a recommendation to the Senate for the brevet commission of captain. The Senate referred the matter to the Military Commission, and there it was lost. On November 1, 1874, King was dangerously wounded at Sunset Pass. He was then only saved from falling into the hands of the savages by the devotion of Sergeant Bernard Taylor, a devotion carried to the point of insubordination, for the latter refused to save himself, although ordered to do so, and held the howling Apaches in check until reinforcements arrived.

It was characteristic of King that he should have exposed himself to the certainty of torture and a horrible death by ordering Sergeant Taylor to leave him. It is characteristic also that, in his wounded and exhausted condition, the first thing he did on his arrival at Camp Verde was to dictate an official report, in which he praised the "superb courage" of Sergeant Taylor and made honorable mention of other brave soldiers. And it is gratifying to note that Congress awarded a medal of honor to Taylor. King himself gained no recognition. His only brevets were his wounds, received in action.

For months King was laid up with a shattered sabre arm. Before the ugly wound had healed he was in the saddle again, sharing in every fight, and suffering all the terrible privations of the Fifth Cavalry in the Big Horn and Yellowstone expedition of 1876. At the close of the campaign the regimental commander, Wesley Merritt, rewarded

him with the adjutancy of the regiment. This was in October, 1876, and Charles King did honor to the position, to the officer who appointed him, and to the regiment, in that capacity, for the next fifteen months.

The regiment had but little time in garrison, for early in the spring of 1877 the Fifth Cavalry and its adjutant were up along the Big Horn range again. The great railway-riots of that year brought by rail to Chicago and Council Bluffs some of King's regiment, many of the representatives bronzed, bearded, with ragged shirts and buckskin breeches, but all ablaze with cartridges. The regiment was only three weeks on this kind of home-guard duty when the command was sent scurrying back across the continent to meet and head off Chief Joseph and the Nez Percés in their famous raid from Idaho to the edge of the States, *via* the Yellowstone Park.

That was a glorious summer and autumn for Adjutant King. He loved the mountain and the saddle. His idea of happiness in the discharge of what, alas! *was* his profession was activity and scenery and the spice of occasional sharp fighting.

1878 was for his regiment another year of mountain-scouting, but it was also a year of suffering for King. The Arizona wound, so far from healing, had grown worse. There was incessant exfoliation of the bone, and a drain upon the system that proved too much for him. He had never spared himself; he loved his calling; his future was bright with promise; he was not half the threescore and ten years allotted to man; but he was forced to ask that he be sent before a retiring board. In June, 1879, having meanwhile been promoted captain of A Troop, King joined the little array of shelved warriors on the retired list, and, except for an occasional and deeply-relished visit, saw his old regiment no more.

After his retirement he went speedily to his old State,—was for two years one of the faculty of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and began at once his connection with the National Guard which has continued to this day. Governor Jeremiah Rusk made him colonel and aide-de-camp in March, 1882, and he holds that position now.

King has a bright and happy home on Farwell Avenue, Milwaukee, up on the bluffs overlooking the dancing waters of Lake Michigan. They—he and the lady who owns the Metairie whip—have three children, two daughters and a little fellow who is a chip of his cavalry father and never so happy as when perched up on the saddle in front of him. Riding is still the captain's favorite exercise, and he had a gorgeous time of it with the old Fifth Cavalry down in the Indian Territory and Texas, last April,—hunting and scouting with his comrades. It was there he picked up the scenes of "Dunraven Ranch." It may be supposed that officers of the Fifth Cavalry suggested some of the characters; but, contrary to general impression, that regiment has furnished very few of them in all his stories combined. There were only two or three in "The Colonel's Daughter" and "Marion's Faith." "Billy Ray," who won so many friends, was never in the Fifth Cavalry in his life. This is a fact, despite the confident assertions of a good many army readers and one or two knowing critics. "I don't know why it is supposed I never knew anybody outside the Fifth

Cavalry," said Captain King on receiving a letter which located the entire *dramatis personæ* of his novels in that regiment. "One thing seems certain, no one concedes that it is possible for me to create a character,—even such humdrum creatures as these people of my stories happen to be. In point of fact, most of them are as purely imaginary as are all the incidents,—except the Indian-fighting."

The Fifth Cavalry were right in one estimate, however,—viz., that "Jack Truscott" had his original in their midst; and to this day the intimacy and friendship between the author and his hero exist as in the old days when they lived and campaigned together. In his sketch, "The Worst Man in the Troop," published in *Lippincott's Magazine* in September, 1883, he has told of the daring and devotion of the brave Irish sergeant who rescued his wounded commander from the howling Apaches.

Poor Taylor has been dead many a year, but the lieutenant who came dashing up the rocky mountain-side at the head of the reinforcements that saved the day was "Jack Truscott." Jack's voice was gone by the time he reached his young commander and comrade that eventful Sunday. He could only lean over and whisper his anxious and breathless inquiry, "Much hurt, old man?" and received, in reply, the combined assurance and order in the same instant, "Arm busted,—that's all. Pitch in and clean 'em out." One Spartan lieutenant obeyed the other, and in five minutes more the Indians were scattering for their lives and "Jack" could come back and wash the blood from his comrade's face and bind up the gaping hole in his shoulder.

In the study where Captain King writes his soldier stories is the veritable Navajo blanket in which the soldiers bundled their crippled leader and bore him down the mountain-side when the fight was over. There, too, is "Jack's" picture in the old uniform among those of more than twenty other officers of the "Dandy Fifth,"—General Merritt being in the foreground and Adjutant King to his rear; but "Jack Truscott" has long since laid down the sabre and discarded the regimentals. He has extensive and lucrative mining and cattle interests now in Montana. Time has thinned the hair on his massive head and added weight to the stalwart form; but the voice rings out with all the old vim when occasion requires. Only last June, King sat in the gallery of the great auditorium at Chicago when the Republican Convention was in session. Chairman after chairman of State delegations was greeted with impatient shouts of "Louder!" but when "Jack" came to announce the vote of his colleagues, King looked radiant and reminiscent when "Montana!" was called and "Jack Truscott" rose to his six feet four and his voice went sailing like a trumpet note through the immense vaulted building. The hero of "The Colonel's Daughter" is a leader of men now, despite the fact that he long since quit soldering.

King in everything save that crippled arm of his is a soldier. With him it is the soldier and the soldier life that predominate. The interior of his up-stairs study is in keeping with the profession and the tastes of the occupant. Suspended from the walls are the shoulder-knots, sword-belt, sabre, and forage-cap that did service, years ago, in Arizona. The fifth numeral is in the cap front, and in the centre of the

insignia of rank. Buckskin leggings,—given him by Buffalo Bill,—embroidered by Indian hands with parti-colored beads, are there. The portrait in oil of his father, General Rufus King, looks down upon maps and faded blue prints of the region about Tonto Basin, Arizona, —a spot destined to become as much of a place of resort for tourists and artists as the Falls of the Yosemite or Niagara. In one of the drawers of Captain King's writing-desk are the note-books, itineraries, and travel-routes kept by him with fidelity and neatness during his active military career. The magnificent presentation-sword owned by General King is displayed by his soldier-author son in the reception-room down-stairs; there too, on the mantel, is the Metairie whip, relic of the New Orleans race; but the photographs of King's soldier-friends are all kept in his study, and lending a charm to it all is the refined, kindly, handsome face of the host, whose voice, like the touch of his bridle-hand, is soft and sincere as a woman's, but can be stern and cold as steel.

Philip Reade, First Lieutenant Third Infantry, U.S.A.

TO ALL WOMEN.

I.

O SORROWING women, ye who weep in vain,
Who uncaressed sob on through the dark night,
With broken wings that ache to feel the light,
Strained out above joy's corpse untimely slain,—
All ye who, pure or fallen, live in pain,
Who suffer woman-pangs,—or wrong or right,—
Yearning through blistering tears for some lost sight,
Wooing through alien sounds some hushed refrain,—
All ye who pine to cease rather than die,
Who dread a second consciousness, and long
Only for peace as peace is known to graves,
Not to the buried,—unto you I cry,
My heart yearns over you, to you belong
These words of love, as to the sea its waves.

II.

Dear God, that I could gather to my heart
In one supreme pang all the awful throes
That wrench the heart of women!—take their woes,
As from tired children's hands that slide apart
We lift the burden that has made them smart,
Or from some stem whereon a sweet flower grows
Strip all the thorns, and give them back the rose!
I could bear bravely all my life this part,

The Worst Man In The Troop.

By Captain Charles King,
U. S. A.

Philadelphia:
J. B. Lippincott Company.

duty under the law by declaring the officer entitled to the custody of Cook. The noon train bore the strangely ill-fated prisoner on his way to Virginia and to death. No man in like peril ever seemed to have had so many entirely practicable opportunities for escape; but all failed, even with the exercise of what would be judged as the soundest discretion for his safety. His return to the Charlestown jail, his memorable trial, his inevitable conviction, his only cowardly act of submitting to recapture when he had broken out of his cell a few hours before his execution, and his final execution with his captive comrades, are familiar to all. His trial attracted more attention than that of any of the others, because of the prominent men enlisted in his cause, and of the special interest felt in him by the community in and about Harper's Ferry. He had taught school there some years before, had married there, and his return as one of John Brown's raiders to kindle the flames of slave insurrection intensified the bitterness of the people against him. From the 28th day of October, 1859, when he was lodged in the Charlestown jail, until the last act of the tragedy, when he was executed, Cook attracted the larger share of public interest in Harper's Ferry, much as Brown outstripped him in national or world-wide fame. Governor Willard, the Democratic executive of Indiana, appeared in person on the scene, and made exhaustive efforts to save his wayward but beloved brother-in-law. Daniel W. Voorhees, now United States Senator from Indiana, was then attorney-general of his State; and his devotion to his party chief made him excel every previous or later effort of his life in pleading the utterly hopeless cause of the brilliant little Virginia insurgent. It was a grand legal and forensic battle; but there was not an atom of law to aid the defence, and public sentiment was vehement for the atonement. Viewed in the clearer light and calmer judgment of the experience of a quarter of a century, it would have been wiser and better had Virginia treated John Brown and his corporal's guard of madmen as hopeless lunatics by imprisonment for life, as was strongly advised by confidential counsels from some prominent men of the land whose judgment was entitled to respect; but Governor Wise, always a lover of the tempest, made a dress-parade burlesque of justice, and on the 16th day of December, 1859, amidst the pomp and parade of the concentrated power of the "Mother of Presidents," John E. Cook paid the penalty of his crime on the gallows. No demand was ever made for the rendition of Cook's companions who had escaped from Harper's Ferry into the South Mountain with him. Some of them lived in Northern Pennsylvania without concealment, but none thought of arresting them. A few months thereafter the long-threatening clouds of fraternal war broke in fury upon the country; the song of John Brown inspired great armies as they swept through the terrible flame of battle from the Father of Waters to the Southern sea, and the cause that made lawless madmen of Brown and Cook at Harper's Ferry crowned the republic with universal freedom at Appomattox.

A. K. McClure.

THE WORST MAN IN THE TROOP.

JUST why that young Irishman should have been so balefully branded was more than the first lieutenant of the troop could understand. To be sure, the lieutenant's opportunities for observation had been limited. He had spent some years on detached service in the East, and had joined his comrades in Arizona but a fortnight ago, and here he was already becoming rapidly initi-

ated in the science of scouting through mountain-wilds against the wariest and most treacherous of foemen,—the Apaches of our Southwestern territory.

Coming, as he had done, direct from a station and duties where full-dress uniform, lavish expenditure for kid gloves, bouquets, and Lubin's extracts were matters of daily fact, it must be admitted that the sensations he experienced on seeing his detachment equipped for the scout were those of mild consternation. That much latitude as to individual dress and equipment was permitted he had previously been informed; that "full dress," and white shirts, collars, and the like, would be left at home, he had sense enough to know; but that every officer and man in the command would be allowed to discard any and all portions of the regulation uniform and appear rigged out in just such motley guise as his poetic or practical fancy might suggest, had never been pointed out to him; and that he, commanding his troop while his captain commanded the little battalion, could by any military possibility take his place in front of his men without his sabre, had never for an instant occurred to him. As a consequence, when he bolted into the mess-room shortly after daybreak on a bright June morning with that imposing but at most times useless item of cavalry equipment clanking at his heels, the lieutenant gazed with some astonishment upon the attire of his brother-officers there assembled, but found himself the butt of much good-natured and not over-witty "chaff," directed partially at the extreme newness and neatness of his dark-blue flannel scouting-shirt and high-top boots, but more especially at the glittering sabre swinging from his waist-belt.

"Billings," said Captain Buxton with much solemnity, "while you have probably learned through the columns of a horror-stricken Eastern press that we scalp, alive or dead, all unfortunates who fall into our clutches, I assure you that even for that purpose the cavalry-sabre has, in Arizona at least, outlived its usefulness. It is too long and clumsy, you see. What you really want for the purpose is something like this,"—and he whipped out of its sheath a rusty but keen-bladed Mexican *cuchillo*,—"something you can wield with a deft turn of the wrist, you know. The sabre is apt to tear and mutilate the flesh, especially when you use both hands." And Captain Buxton winked at his other subaltern and felt that he had said a good thing.

But Mr. Billings was a man of infinite good nature and ready adaptability to the society or circumstances with which he might be surrounded. "Chaff" was a very cheap order of wit, and the serenity of his disposition enabled him to shake off its effect as readily as water is scattered from the plumage of the duck.

"So you don't wear the sabre on a scout? So much the better. I have my revolvers and a Sharp's carbine, but am destitute of anything in the knife line." And with that Mr. Billings betook himself to the duty of despatching the breakfast that was already spread before him in an array tempting enough to a frontier appetite, but little designed to attract a *bon vivant* of civilization. Bacon, *frijoles*, and creamless coffee speedily become ambrosia and nectar under the influence of mountain-air and mountain-exercise; but Mr. Billings had as yet done no climbing. A "buck-board" ride had been his means of transportation to the garrison,—a lonely four-company post in a far-away valley in Northeastern Arizona,—and in the three or four days of intense heat that had succeeded his arrival exercise of any kind had been out of the question. It was with no especial regret, therefore, that he heard the summons of his captain, "Hurry up, man; we must be off in ten minutes." And in less than ten minutes the lieutenant was on his horse and superintending the formation of his troop.

If Mr. Billings was astonished at the garb of his brother-officers at breakfast, he was simply aghast when he glanced along the line of Company "A" (as his command was at that time officially designated) and the first sergeant rode out

to report his men present or accounted for. The first sergeant himself was got up in an old gray-flannel shirt, open at and disclosing a broad, brown throat and neck; his head was crowned with what had once been a white felt *sombrero*, now tanned by desert sun, wind, and dirt into a dingy mud-color; his powerful legs were encased in worn deer-skin breeches tucked into low-topped, broad-soled, well-greased boots; his waist was girt with a rude "thimble-belt," in the loops of which were thrust scores of copper cartridges for carbine and pistol; his carbine, and those of all the command, swung in a leather loop athwart the pommel of the saddle; revolvers in all manner of cases hung at the hip, the regulation holster, in most instances, being conspicuous by its absence. Indeed, throughout the entire command the remarkable fact was to be noted that a company of regular cavalry, taking the field against hostile Indians, had discarded pretty much every item of dress or equipment prescribed or furnished by the authorities of the United States, and had supplied themselves with an outfit utterly ununiform, unpicturesque, undeniably slouchy, but not less undeniably appropriate and serviceable. Not a forage-cap was to be seen, not a "campaign-hat" of the style then prescribed by a board of officers that might have known something of hats, but never could have had an idea on the subject of campaigns. Fancy that black enormity of weighty felt, with flapping brim well-nigh a foot in width, absorbing the fiery heat of an Arizona sun, and concentrating the burning rays upon the cranium of its unhappy wearer! No such head-gear would our troopers suffer in the days when General Crook led them through the cañons and deserts of that inhospitable Territory. Regardless of appearances or style himself, seeking only comfort in his dress, the chief speedily found means to indicate that, in Apache-campaigning at least, it was to be a case of "*inter arma silent leges*" in dead earnest; for, freely translated, the old saw read, "No red-tape when Indian-fighting."

Of much of this Lieutenant Billings was only partially informed, and so, as has been said, he was aghast when he marked the utter absence of uniform and the decidedly variegated appearance of his troop. Deer-skin, buckskin, canvas, and flannels, leggings, moccasins, and the like, constituted the bill of dress, and old soft felt hats, originally white, the head-gear. If spurs were worn at all, they were of the Mexican variety, easy to kick off, but sure to stay on when wanted. Only two men wore carbine sling-belts, and Mr. Billings was almost ready to hunt up his captain and inquire if by any possibility the men could be attempting to "put up a joke on him," when the captain himself appeared, looking little if any more like the ideal soldier than his men, and the perfectly satisfied expression on his face as he rode easily around, examining closely the horses of the command, paying especial attention to their feet and the shoes thereof, convinced the lieutenant that all was as it was expected to be, if not as it should be, and he swallowed his surprise and held his peace. Another moment, and Captain Wayne's troop came filing past in column of twos, looking, if anything, rougher than his own.

"You follow right after Wayne," said Captain Buxton; and with no further formality Mr. Billings, in a perfunctory sort of way, wheeled his men to the right by fours, broke into column of twos, and closed up on the leading troop.

Buxton was in high glee on this particular morning in June. He had done very little Indian scouting, had been but moderately successful in what he had undertaken, and now, as luck would have it, the necessity arose for sending something more formidable than a mere detachment down into the Tonto Basin, in search of a powerful band of Apaches who had broken loose from the reservation and were taking refuge in the foothills of the Black Mesa or among the wilds of the Sierra Ancha. As senior captain of the two, Buxton became commander of the entire force,—two

well-filled troops of regular cavalry, some thirty Indian allies as scouts, and a goodly-sized train of pack-mules, with its full complement of packers, *cargadors*, and blacksmiths. He fully anticipated a lively fight, possibly a series of them, and a triumphant return to his post, where hereafter he would be looked up to and quoted as an expert and authority on Apache-fighting. He knew just where the hostiles lay, and was going straight to the point to flatten them out forthwith; and so the little command moved off under admirable auspices and in the best of spirits.

It was a four-days' hard march to the locality where Captain Buxton counted on finding his victims; and when on the fourth day, rather tired and not particularly enthusiastic, the command bivouacked along the banks of a mountain-torrent, a safe distance from the supposed location of the Indian stronghold, he sent forward his Apache Mojave allies to make a stealthy reconnoissance, feeling confident that soon after nightfall they would return with the intelligence that the enemy were lazily resting in their ranchería, all unsuspicious of his approach, and that at daybreak he would pounce upon and annihilate them.

Soon after nightfall the scouts did return, but their intelligence was not so gratifying: a small—a *very* small—band of renegades had been encamped in that vicinity some weeks before, but not a "hostile" or sign of a hostile was to be found. Captain Buxton hardly slept that night, from disappointment and mortification, and when he went the following day to investigate for himself he found that he had been on a false scent from the start, and this made him crabbed. A week's hunt through the mountains resulted in no better luck, and now, having had only fifteen days' rations at the outset, he was most reluctantly and savagely marching homeward to report his failure.

But Mr. Billings had enjoyed the entire trip. Sleeping in the open air without other shelter than their blankets afforded, scouting by day in single file over miles of mere game-trails, up hill and down dale through the wildest and most dolefully-picturesque scenery he at least had ever beheld, under frowning cliffs and beetling crags, through dense forests of pine and juniper, through mountain-torrents swollen with the melting snows of the crests so far above them, through cañons, deep, dark, and gloomy, searching ever for traces of the foe they were ordered to find and fight forthwith, Mr. Billings and his men, having no responsibility upon their shoulders, were happy and healthy as possible, and consequently in small sympathy with their irate leader.

Every afternoon when they halted beside some one of the hundreds of mountain-brooks that came tumbling down from the gorges of the Black Mesa, the men were required to look carefully at the horses' backs and feet, for mountain Arizona is terrible on shoes, equine or human. This had to be done before the herds were turned out to graze with their guard around them; and often some of the men would get a wisp of straw or a suitable wipe of some kind, and thoroughly rub down their steeds. Strolling about among them, as he always did at this time, our lieutenant had noticed a slim but trimly-built young Irishman whose care of and devotion to his horse it did him good to see. No matter how long the march, how severe the fatigue, that horse was always looked after, his grazing-ground pre-empted by a deftly-thrown picket-pin and lariat which secured to him all the real estate that could be surveyed within the circle of which the pin was the centre and the lariat the radius-vector.

Between horse and master the closest comradeship seemed to exist; the trooper had a way of softly singing or talking to his friend as he rubbed him down, and Mr. Billings was struck with the expression and taste with which the little soldier—for he was only five feet five—would render "Molly Bawn" and "Kitty Tyrrell." Except when thus singing or exchanging confidences with his steed, he was strangely silent and reserved; he ate his rations among the

other men, yet rarely spoke with them, and he would ride all day through country marvellous for wild beauty and be the only man in the command who did not allow himself to give vent to some expression of astonishment or delight.

"What is that man's name?" asked Mr. Billings of the first sergeant one evening.

"O'Grady, sir," replied the sergeant, with his soldierly salute; and a little later, as Captain Buxton was fretfully complaining to his subaltern of the ill fortune that seemed to overshadow his best efforts, the latter, thinking to cheer him and to divert his attention from his trouble, referred to the troop:

"Why, captain, I don't think I ever saw a finer set of men than you have—anywhere. Now, *there's* a little fellow who strikes me as being a perfect light-cavalry soldier." And the lieutenant indicated his young Irishman.

"You don't mean O'Grady?" asked the captain in surprise.

"Yes, sir,—the very one."

"Why, he's the worst man in the troop."

For a moment Mr. Billings knew not what to say. His captain had spoken with absolute harshness and dislike in his tone of the one soldier of all others who seemed to be the most quiet, attentive, and alert of the troop. He had noticed, too, that the sergeants and the men generally, in speaking to O'Grady, were wont to fall into a kindlier tone than usual, and, though they sometimes squabbled among themselves over the choice of patches of grass for their horses, O'Grady's claim was never questioned, much less "jumped." Respect for his superior's rank would not permit the lieutenant to argue the matter; but, desiring to know more about the case, he spoke again:

"I am very sorry to hear it. His care of his horse and his quiet ways impressed me so favorably."

"Oh, yes, d—n him!" broke in Captain Buxton. "Horses and whiskey are the only things on earth he cares for. As to quiet ways, there isn't a worse devil at large than O'Grady with a few drinks in him. When I came back from two years' recruiting detail he was a sergeant in the troop. I never knew him before, but I soon found he was addicted to drink, and after a while had to 'break' him; and one night when he was raising hell in the quarters, and I ordered him into the dark cell, he turned on me like a tiger. By Jove! if it hadn't been for some of the men he would have killed me,—or I him. He was tried by court-martial, but most of the detail was made up of infantrymen and staff-officers from Crook's head-quarters, and, by ——! they didn't seem to think it any sin for a soldier to threaten to cut his captain's heart out, and Crook himself gave me a sort of a rap in his remarks on the case, and—well, they just let O'Grady off scot-free between them, gave him some little fine, and did more harm than good. He's just as surly and insolent now when I speak to him as he was that night when drunk. Here, I'll show you." And with that Captain Buxton started off toward the herd, Mr. Billings obediently following, but feeling vaguely ill at ease. He had never met Captain Buxton before; but letters from his comrades had prepared him for experiences not altogether pleasant. A good soldier in some respects, Captain Buxton bore the reputation of having an almost ungovernable temper, of being at times brutally violent in his language and conduct toward his men, and, worse yet, of bearing ill-concealed malice, and "nursing his wrath to keep it warm" against such of his enlisted men as had ever ventured to appeal for justice. The captain stopped on reaching the outskirts of the quietly-grazing herd.

"Corporal," said he to the non-commissioned officer in charge, "isn't that O'Grady's horse off there to the left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go and tell O'Grady to come here."

The corporal saluted and went off on his errand.

"Now, Mr. Billings," said the captain, "I have repeatedly given orders that my horses must be side-lined when we are in the hostiles' country. Just

come here to the left." And he walked over toward a handsome, sturdy little California horse of a bright bay color. "Here, you see, is O'Grady's horse, and not a side-line: that's his way of obeying orders. More than that, he is never content to have his horse in among the others, but must always get away outside, just where he is most apt to be run off by any Indian sharp and quick enough to dare it. Now, here comes O'Grady. Watch him, if you want to see him in his true light."

Standing beside his superior, Mr. Billings looked toward the approaching trooper, who, with a quick, springy step, advanced to within a few yards of them, there stopped short, and, erect and in silence, raised his hand in salute, and with perfectly respectful demeanor looked straight at his captain.

In a voice at once harsh and distinctly audible over the entire bivouac, with frowning brow and angry eyes, Buxton demanded,—

"O'Grady, where are your side-lines?"

"Over with my blankets, sir."

"Over with your blankets, are they? Why in ——, sir, are they not here on your horse, where they ought to be?" And the captain's voice waxed harsher and louder, and his manner more threatening.

"I understood the captain's orders to be that they need not go on till sunset," replied the soldier calmly and respectfully, "and I don't like to put them on that sore place, sir, until the last moment."

"Don't like to? No sir, I know d—d well you don't like to obey this or any other order I ever gave, and wherever you find a loop-hole through which to crawl, and you think you can sneak off unpunished, by ——! sir, I suppose you will go on disobeying orders. Shut up, sir! not a d—d word!" for tears of mortification were starting to O'Grady's eyes, and with flushing face and trembling lip the soldier stood helplessly before his troop-commander, and was striving to say a word in further explanation.

"Go and get your side-lines at once and bring them here; go at once, sir," shouted the captain; and with a lump in his throat the trooper saluted, faced about, and walked away.

"He's milder-mannered than usual. d—n him!" said the captain, turning toward his subaltern, who had stood a silent and pained witness of the scene. "He knows he is in the wrong and has no excuse; but he'll break out yet. Come! step out, you O'Grady!" he yelled after the rapidly-walking soldier. "Double time, sir. I can't wait here all night." And Mr. Billings noted that silence had fallen on the bivouac so full of soldier-chaff and laughter but a moment before, and that the men of both troops were intently watching the scene already so painful to him.

Obediently O'Grady took up the "dog-trot" required of him, got his side-lines, and, running back, knelt beside his horse, and with trembling hands adjusted them, during which performance Captain Buxton stood over him, and, in a tone that grew more and more that of a bully as he lashed himself up into a rage, continued his lecture to the man.

The latter finally rose, and, with huge beads of perspiration starting out on his forehead, faced his captain.

"May I say a word, sir?" he asked.

"You may now; but be d—d careful how you say it," was the reply, with a sneer that would have stung an abject slave into a longing for revenge, and that grated on Mr. Billings's nerves in a way that made him clinch his fists and involuntarily grit his teeth. Could it be that O'Grady detected it? Already the men had "taken the measure" of this even-tempered, kindly-voiced young West-Pointer, and begun to like him. One quick, wistful, half-appealing glance flashed from the Irishman's eyes toward the subaltern, and then, with evident effort at composure, but with a voice that trembled with the pent-up sense of wrong and injustice, O'Grady spoke:

"Indeed, sir, I had no thought of neglecting orders. I always care for my

horse; but it wasn't sunset when the captain came out—"

"Not sunset!" broke in Buxton, with an outburst of profanity. "Not sunset! why, it's wellnigh dark now, sir, and every man in the troop had side-lined his horse half an hour ago. D—n your insolence, sir! your excuse is worse than your conduct. Mr. Billings, see to it, sir, that this man walks and leads his horse in rear of the troop all the way back to the post. I'll see, by ——! whether he can be taught to obey orders." And with that the captain turned and strode away.

The lieutenant stood for an instant stunned,—simply stunned. Involuntarily he made a step toward O'Grady; their eyes met; but the restraint of discipline was upon both. In that brief meeting of their glances, however, the trooper read a message that was unmistakable.

"Lieutenant,—" he said, but stopped abruptly, pointed aloft over the trees to the eastward with his right hand, dashed it across his eyes, and then, with hurried salute and a choking sort of gurgle in his throat, he turned and went back to his comrades.

Mr. Billings gazed after the retreating form until it disappeared among the trees by the brook-side; then he turned to see what was the meaning of the soldier's pointing over toward the mesa to the east.

Down in the deep valley in which the little command had halted for the night the pall of darkness had indeed begun to settle; the bivouac-fires in the timber threw a lurid glare upon the groups gathering around them for supper, and toward the west the rugged upheavals of the Mazatzal range stood like a black barrier against the glorious hues of a bank of summer cloud. All in the valley spoke of twilight and darkness: the birds were still, the voices of the men subdued. So far as local indications were concerned, it *was*—as Captain Buxton had insisted—almost dark. But square over the gilded tree-tops to the east, stretching for miles and miles to their right and left, blazed a vertical wall of rock crested with scrub-oak and pine, every boulder, every tree, glittering in the radiant light of the invisibly setting sun. O'Grady had *not* disobeyed his orders.

Noting this, Mr. Billings proceeded to take a leisurely stroll through the peaceful herd, carefully inspecting each horse as he passed. As a result of his scrutiny, he found that, while most of the horses were already encumbered with their annoying hobble, in "A" troop alone there were at least a dozen still unfettered, notably the mounts of the non-commissioned officers and the older soldiers. Like O'Grady, they did not wish to inflict the side-line upon their steeds until the last moment. Unlike O'Grady, they had not been called to account for it.

When Mr. Billings was summoned to supper, and he rejoined his brother-officers, it was remarked that he was more taciturn than usual. After that repast had been appreciatively disposed of, and the little group with lighted pipes prepared to spend an hour in chat and contentment, it was observed that Mr. Billings did not take part in the general talk, but that he soon rose, and, out of ear-shot of the officers' camp-fire, paced restlessly up and down, with his head bent forward, evidently plunged in thought.

By and by the half-dozen broke up and sought their blankets. Captain Buxton, somewhat mollified by a good supper, was about rolling into his navajo, when Mr. Billings stepped up:

"Captain, may I ask for information as to the side-line order? After you left this evening, I found that there must be some misunderstanding about it."

"How so?" said Buxton shortly.

"In this, captain;" and Mr. Billings spoke very calmly and distinctly. "The first sergeant, several other non-commissioned officers and men,—more than a dozen, I should say,—did not side-line their horses until half an hour after you spoke to O'Grady, and the first sergeant assured me, when I called him to account for it, that your orders were that it should be done at sunset."

"Well, by ——! it was after sunset

—at least it was getting mighty dark—when I sent for that blackguard O'Grady," said Buxton impetuously, "and there is no excuse for the rest of them."

"It was beginning to grow dark down in this deep valley, I know, sir; but the tree-tops were in a broad glare of sunlight while we were at the herd, and those cliffs for half an hour longer."

"Well, Mr. Billings, I don't propose to have any hair-splitting in the management of my troop," said the captain, manifestly nettled. "It was practically sunset to us when the light began to grow dim, and my men know it well enough." And with that he rolled over and turned his back to his subaltern.

Disregarding the broad hint to leave, Mr. Billings again spoke:

"Is it your wish, sir, that any punishment should be imposed on the men who were equally in fault with O'Grady?"

Buxton muttered something unintelligible from under his blankets.

"I did not understand you, sir," said the lieutenant very civilly.

Buxton savagely propped himself up on one elbow, and blurted out,—

"No, Mr. Billings! no! When I want a man punished I'll give the order myself, sir."

"And is it still your wish, sir, that I make O'Grady walk the rest of the way?"

For a moment Buxton hesitated; his better nature struggled to assert itself and induce him to undo the injustice of his order; but the "cad" in his disposition, the weakness of his character, prevailed. It would never do to let his lieutenant get the upper hand of him, he argued, and so the reply came, and came angrily:

"Yes, of course; he deserves it anyhow, by ——! and it'll do him good."

Without another word Mr. Billings turned on his heel and left him.

The command returned to garrison, shaved its stubbly beard of two weeks' growth, and resumed its uniform and the routine duties of the post. Three days only had it been back when Mr. Billings, marching on as officer of the day, and receiving the prisoners from his predecessor, was startled to hear the list of names wound up with "O'Grady," and when that name was called there was no response.

The old officer of the day looked up inquiringly: "Where is O'Grady, sergeant?"

"In the cell, sir, unable to come out."

"O'Grady was confined by Captain Buxton's order late last night," said Captain Wayne, "and I fancy the poor fellow has been drinking heavily this time."

A few minutes after, the reliefs being told off, the prisoners sent out to work, and the officers of the day, new and old, having made their reports to the commanding officer, Mr. Billings returned to the guard-house, and, directing his sergeant to accompany him, proceeded to make a deliberate inspection of the premises. The guard-room itself was neat, clean, and dry; the garrison prison-room was well ventilated, and tidy as such rooms ever can be made; the Indian prison-room, despite the fact that it was empty and every shutter was thrown wide open to the breeze, had that indefinable, suffocating odor which continued aboriginal occupancy will impart to any apartment; but it was the cells Mr. Billings desired to see, and the sergeant led him to a row of heavily-barred doors of rough unplaned timber, with a little grating in each, and from one of these gratings there peered forth a pair of feverishly-glittering eyes, and a face, not bloated and flushed, as with recent and heavy potations, but white, haggard, twitching, and a husky voice in piteous appeal addressed the sergeant:

"Oh, for God's sake, Billy, get me something, or it'll kill me!"

"Hush, O'Grady," said the sergeant: "here's the officer of the day."

Mr. Billings took one look at the wan face only dimly visible in that prison-light, for the poor little man shrank back as he recognized the form of his lieutenant:

"Open that door, sergeant."

With alacrity the order was obeyed, and the heavy door swung back upon its hinges.

"O'Grady," said the officer of the day in a tone gentle as that he would have employed in speaking to a woman, "come out here to me. I'm afraid you are sick."

Shaking, trembling, twitching in every limb, with wild, dilated eyes and almost palsied step, O'Grady came out.

"Look to him a moment, sergeant," said Mr. Billings, and, bending low, he stepped into the cell. The atmosphere was stifling, and in another instant he backed out into the hall-way. "Sergeant, was it by the commanding officer's order that O'Grady was put in there?"

"No, sir; Captain Buxton's."

"See that he is not returned there during my tour, unless the orders come from the colonel. Bring O'Grady into the prison-room."

Here in the purer air and brighter light he looked carefully over the poor fellow, as the latter stood before him quivering from head to foot and hiding his face in his shaking hands. Then the lieutenant took him gently by the arm and led him to a bunk:

"O'Grady, man, lie down here. I'm going to get something that will help you. Tell me one thing: how long had you been drinking before you were confined?"

"About forty-eight hours, sir, off and on."

"How long since you ate anything?"

"I don't know, sir; not for two days, I think."

"Well, try and lie still. I'm coming back to you in a very few minutes."

And with that Mr. Billings strode from the room, leaving O'Grady, dazed, wonder-stricken, gazing stupidly after him.

The lieutenant went straight to his quarters, took a goodly-sized goblet from the painted pine side-board, and with practised hand proceeded to mix therein a beverage in which granulated sugar, Angostura bitters, and a few drops of lime juice entered as minor ingredients, and the coldest of spring-water and a brimming measure of whiskey as constitutents of greater quality and quantity. Filling with this mixture a small leather-covered flask, and stowing it away within the breast-pocket of his blouse, he returned to the guard-house, musing as he went, "'If this be treason,' said Patrick Henry, 'make the most of it.' If this be conduct prejudicial, etc., say I, do your d—dest. That man would be in the horrors of jim-jams in half an hour more if it were not for this." And, so saying to himself, he entered the prison-room, called to the sergeant to bring him some cold water, and then approached O'Grady, who rose unsteadily and strove to stand attention, but the effort was too much, and again he covered his face with his arms, and threw himself in utter misery at the foot of the bunk.

Mr. Billings drew the flask from his pocket, and, touching O'Grady's shoulder, caused him to raise his head:

"Drink this, my lad. I would not give it to you at another time, but you need it now."

Eagerly it was seized, eagerly drained, and then, after he had swallowed a long draught of the water, O'Grady slowly rose to his feet, looking, with eyes rapidly softening and losing their wild glare, upon the young officer who stood before him. Once or twice he passed his hands across his forehead, as though to sweep away the cobwebs that pressed upon his brain, but for a moment he did not essay a word. Little by little the color crept back to his cheek; and, noting this, Mr. Billings smiled very quietly, and said, "Now, O'Grady, lie down; you will be able to sleep now until the men come in at noon; then you shall have another drink, and you'll be able to eat what I send you. If you cannot sleep, call the sergeant of the guard; or if you want anything, I'll come to you."

Then, with tears starting to his eyes, the soldier found words: "I thank the lieutenant. If I live a thousand years, sir, this will never be forgotten,—never, sir! I'd have gone crazy without your help, sir."

Mr. Billings held out his hand, and, taking that of his prisoner, gave it a cordial grip: "That's all right,

O'Grady. Try to sleep now, and we'll pull you through. Good-by, for the present." And, with a heart lighter, somehow, than it had been of late, the lieutenant left.

At noon that day, when the prisoners came in from labor and the officer of the day inspected their general condition before permitting them to go to their dinner, the sergeant of the guard informed him that O'Grady had slept quietly almost all the morning, but was then awake and feeling very much better, though still weak and nervous.

"Do you think he can walk over to my quarters?" asked Mr. Billings.

"He will try it, sir, or anything the lieutenant wants him to try."

"Then send him over in about ten minutes."

Home once more, Mr. Billings started a tiny blaze in his oil-stove, and soon had a kettle of water boiling merrily. Sharp to time a member of the guard tapped at the door, and, on being bidden "Come in," entered, ushering in O'Grady; but meantime, by the aid of a little pot of meat-juice and some cayenne pepper, a glass of hot soup or beef-tea had been prepared, and, with some dainty slices of potted chicken and the accompaniments of a cup of fragrant tea and some ship-biscuit, was in readiness on a little table in the back room. Mr. Billings, it has been hinted, was something of an epicure in his quiet way, and his side-board was never destitute of some delicacy or luxury "the mess" could not supply.

Telling the sentinel to remain in the shade on the piazza, the lieutenant proceeded first to make O'Grady sit down in a big wicker arm-chair, for the man in his broken condition was wellnigh exhausted by his walk across the glaring parade in the heat of an Arizona noon-day sun. Then he mixed and administered the counterpart of the beverage he had given his prisoner-patient in the morning, only in point of potency it was an evident falling off, but sufficient for the purpose, and in a few minutes O'Grady was able to swallow his breakfast with evident relish, meekly and unhesitatingly obeying every suggestion of his superior.

His breakfast finished, O'Grady was then conducted into a cool, darkened apartment, a back room in the lieutenant's quarters.

"Now, pull off your boots and outer clothing, man, spread yourself on that bed, and go to sleep, if you can. If you can't, and you want to read, there are books and papers on that shelf; pin up the blanket on the window, and you'll have light enough. You shall not be disturbed, and I know you won't attempt to leave."

"Indeed, sir, I won't," began O'Grady eagerly; but the lieutenant had vanished, closing the door after him, and a minute later the soldier had thrown himself upon the cool, white bed, and was crying like a tired child.

Three or four weeks after this incident, to the small regret of his troop and the politely-veiled indifference of the commissioned element of the garrison, Captain Buxton concluded to avail himself of a long-deferred "leave," and turned over his company property to Mr. Billings in a condition that rendered it necessary for him to do a thing that "ground" him, so to speak: he had to ask several favors of his lieutenant, between whom and himself there had been no cordiality since the episode of the bivouac, and an open rupture since Mr. Billings's somewhat eventful tour as officer of the day, which has just been described.

It appeared that O'Grady had been absent from no duty (there were no drills in that scorching June weather), but that, yielding to the advice of his comrades, who knew that he had eaten nothing for two days and was drinking steadily into a condition that would speedily bring punishment upon him, he had asked permission to be sent to the hospital, where, while he could get no liquor, there would be no danger attendant upon his sudden stop of all stimulant. The first sergeant carried his request with the sick-book to Captain Buxton, O'Grady meantime managing to take two or three more pulls at the bottle, and Buxton, instead

of sending him to the hospital, sent for him, inspected him, and did what he had no earthly authority to do, directed the sergeant of the guard to confine him at once in the dark cell.

"It will be no punishment as he is now," said Buxton to himself, "but it will be hell when he wakes."

And so it had been; and far worse it probably would have been but for Mr. Billings's merciful interference.

Expecting to find his victim in a condition bordering upon the abject and ready to beg for mercy at any sacrifice of pluck or pride, Buxton had gone to the guard-house soon after retreat and told the sergeant that he desired to see O'Grady, if the man was fit to come out.

What was his surprise when the soldier stepped forth in his trimmest undress uniform, erect and steady, and stood unflinchingly before him! — a day's rest and quiet, a warm bath, wholesome and palatable food, careful nursing, and the kind treatment he had received having brought him round with a sudden turn that he himself could hardly understand.

"How is this?" thundered Buxton. "I ordered you kept in the dark cell."

"The officer of the day ordered him released, sir," said the sergeant of the guard.

And Buxton, choking with rage, stormed into the mess-room, where the younger officers were at dinner, and, regardless of the time, place, or surroundings, opened at once upon his subaltern:

"Mr. Billings, by whose authority did you release O'Grady from the dark cell?"

Mr. Billings calmly applied his napkin to his moustache, and then as calmly replied, "By my own, Captain Buxton."

"By ——! sir, you exceeded your authority."

"Not at all, captain; on the contrary, you exceeded yours."

At this Buxton flew into a rage that seemed to deprive him of all control over his language. Oaths and imprecations poured from his lips; he raved at Billings, despite the efforts of the officers to quiet him, despite the adjutant's threat to report his language at once to the commanding officer.

Mr. Billings paid no attention whatever to his accusations, but went on eating his dinner with an appearance of serenity that only added fuel to his captain's fire. Two or three officers rose and left the table in disgust, and just how far the thing might have gone cannot be accurately told, for in less than three minutes there came a quick, bounding step on the piazza, the clank and rattle of a sabre, and the adjutant fairly sprang back into the room:

"Captain Buxton, you will go at once to your quarters in close arrest, by order of Colonel Treadwell."

Buxton knew his colonel and that little fire-eater of an adjutant too well to hesitate an instant. Muttering imprecations on everybody, he went.

The next morning, O'Grady was released and returned to duty. Two days later, after a lengthy and private interview with his commanding officer, Captain Buxton appeared with him at the officers' mess at dinner-time, made a formal and complete apology to Lieutenant Billings for his offensive language, and to the mess generally for his misconduct; and so the affair blew over; and, soon after, Buxton left, and Mr. Billings became commander of Company "A."

And now, whatever might have been his reputation as to sobriety before, Private O'Grady became a marked man for every soldierly virtue. Week after week he was to be seen every fourth or fifth day, when his guard tour came, reporting to the commanding officer for duty as orderly, the nattiest, trimmest soldier on the detail.

"I always said," remarked Captain Wayne, "that Buxton alone was responsible for that man's downfall; and this proves it. O'Grady has all the instincts of a gentleman about him, and now that he has a gentleman over him he is himself again."

One night, after retreat-parade, there was cheering and jubilee in the quarters of Company "A." Corporal Quinn had been discharged by expiration of term of service, and Private O'Grady was deco-

rated with his chevrons. When October came, the company muster-roll showed that he had won back his old grade; and the garrison knew no better soldier, no more intelligent, temperate, trustworthy non-commissioned officer, than Sergeant O'Grady. In some way or other the story of the treatment resorted to by his amateur medical officer had leaked out. Whether faulty in theory or not, it was crowned with the verdict of success in practice; and, with the strong sense of humor which pervades all organizations wherein the Celt is represented as a component part, Mr. Billings had been lovingly dubbed "Doctor" by his men, and there was not one of their number who would not have gone through fire and water for him.

One night some herdsmen from up the valley galloped wildly into the post. The Apaches had swooped down, run off their cattle, killed one of the cowboys, and scared off the rest. At daybreak the next morning Lieutenant Billings, with Company "A" and about a dozen Indian scouts, was on the trail, with orders to pursue, recapture the cattle, and punish the marauders.

To his disgust, Mr. Billings found that his allies were not of the tribes who had served with him in previous expeditions. All the trusty Apache Mohaves and Hualpais were off with other commands in distant parts of the Territory. He had to take just what the agent could give him at the reservation, —some Apache Yumas, who were total strangers to him. Within forty-eight hours four had deserted and gone back; the others proved worthless as trailers, doubtless intentionally, and had it not been for the keen eye of Sergeant O'Grady it would have been impossible to keep up the pursuit by night; but keep it up they did, and just at sunset, one sharp autumn evening, away up in the mountains, the advance caught sight of the cattle grazing along the shores of a placid little lake, and, in less time than it takes to write it, Mr. Billings and his command tore down upon the quarry, and, leaving a few men to "round up" the herd, were soon engaged in a lively running fight with the fleeing Apaches, which lasted until dark, when the trumpet sounded the recall, and, with horses somewhat blown, but no casualties of importance, the command reassembled and marched back to the grazing-ground by the lake. Here a hearty supper was served out, the horses were rested, then given a good "feed" of barley, and at ten o'clock Mr. Billings with his second lieutenant and some twenty men pushed ahead in the direction taken by the Indians, leaving the rest of the men under experienced non-commissioned officers to drive the cattle back to the valley.

That night the conduct of the Apache Yuma scouts was incomprehensible. Nothing would induce them to go ahead or out on the flanks; they cowered about the rear of column, yet declared that the enemy could not be hereabouts. At two in the morning Mr. Billings found himself well through a pass in the mountains, high peaks rising to his right and left, and a broad valley in front. Here he gave the order to unsaddle and camp for the night.

At daybreak all were again on the alert: the search for the trail was resumed. Again the Indians refused to go out without the troops; but the men themselves found the tracks of Tonto moccasins along the bed of a little stream purling through the cañon, and presently indications that they had commenced the ascent of the mountain to the south. Leaving a guard with his horses and pack-mules, the lieutenant ordered up his men, and soon the little command was silently picking its way through rock and boulder, scrub-oak and tangled juniper and pine. Rougher and steeper grew the ascent; more and more the Indians cowered, huddling together in rear of the soldiers. Twice Mr. Billings signalled a halt, and, with his sergeants, fairly drove the scouts up to the front and ordered them to hunt for signs. In vain they protested, "No sign, —no Tonto here;" their very looks belied them, and the young commander ordered the search to be continued. In their eagerness the men soon leaped ahead of the wretched allies, and the

latter fell back in the same huddled group as before.

After half an hour of this sort of work, the party came suddenly upon a point whence it was possible to see much of the face of the mountain they were scaling. Cautioning his men to keep within the concealment afforded by the thick timber, Mr. Billings and his comrade-lieutenant crept forward and made a brief reconnoissance. It was evident at a glance that the farther they went the steeper grew the ascent and the more tangled the low shrubbery, for it was little better, until, near the summit, trees and underbrush, and herbage of every description, seemed to cease entirely, and a vertical cliff of jagged rocks stood sentinel at the crest, and stretched east and west the entire length of the face of the mountain.

"By Jove, Billings! if they are on top of that it will be a nasty place to rout them out of," observed the junior.

"I'm going to find out where they are, anyhow," replied the other. "Now those infernal Yumas have *got* to scout, whether they want to or not. You stay here with the men, ready to come the instant I send or signal."

In vain the junior officer protested against being left behind; he was directed to send a small party to see if there were an easier way up the hill-side farther to the west, but to keep the main body there in readiness to move whichever way they might be required. Then, with Sergeant O'Grady and the reluctant Indians, Mr. Billings pushed up to the left front, and was soon out of sight of his command. For fifteen minutes he drove his scouts, dispersed in skirmish order, ahead of him, but incessantly they sneaked behind rocks and trees out of his sight; twice he caught them trying to drop back, and at last, losing all patience, he sprang forward, saying, "Then *come* on, you whelps, if you cannot lead," and he and the sergeant hurried ahead. Then the Yumas huddled together again and slowly followed.

Fifteen minutes more, and Mr. Billings found himself standing on the edge of a broad shelf of the mountain, —a shelf covered with huge boulders of rock tumbled there by storm and tempest, riven by lightning-stroke or the slow disintegration of nature from the bare, glaring, precipitous ledge he had marked from below. East and west it seemed to stretch, forbidding and inaccessible. Turning to the sergeant, Mr. Billings directed him to make his way off to the right and see if there were any possibility of finding a path to the summit; then looking back down the side, and marking his Indians cowering under the trees some fifty yards away, he signalled "come up," and was about moving farther to his left to explore the shelf, when something went whizzing past his head, and, embedding itself in a stunted oak behind him, shook and quivered with the shock,—a Tonto arrow. Only an instant did he see it, photographed as by electricity upon the retina, when with a sharp stinging pang and whirring "whist" and thud a second arrow, better aimed, tore through the flesh and muscles just at the outer corner of his left eye, and glanced away down the hill. With one spring he gained the edge of the shelf, and shouted to the scouts to come on. Even as he did so, bang! bang! went the reports of two rifles among the rocks, and, as with one accord, the Apache Yumas turned tail and rushed back down the hill, leaving him alone in the midst of hidden foes. Stung by the arrow, bleeding, but not seriously hurt, he crouched behind a rock, with carbine at ready, eagerly looking for the first sign of an enemy. The whiz of another arrow from the left drew his eyes thither, and quick as a flash his weapon leaped to his shoulder, the rocks rang with its report, and one of the two swarthy forms he saw among the boulders tumbled over out of sight; but even as he threw back his piece to reload, a rattling volley greeted him, the carbine dropped to the ground, a strange, numbed sensation had seized his shoulder, and his right arm, shattered by a rifle-bullet, hung dangling by the flesh, while the blood gushed forth in a torrent.

Defenceless, he sprang back to the

edge; there was nothing for it now but to run until he could meet his men. Well he knew they would be tearing up the mountain to the rescue. Could he hold out till then? Behind him with shout and yells came the Apaches, arrow and bullet whistling over his head; before him lay the steep descent,—jagged rocks, thick, tangled bushes: it was a desperate chance; but he tried it, leaping from rock to rock, holding his helpless arm in his left hand; then his foot slipped: he plunged heavily forward; quickly the nerves threw out their signal for support to the muscles of the shattered member, but its work was done, its usefulness destroyed; missing its support, he plunged heavily forward, and went crashing down among the rocks eight or ten feet below, cutting a jagged gash in his forehead, while the blood rained down into his eyes and blinded him; but he struggled up and on a few yards more; then another fall, and, wellnigh senseless, utterly exhausted, he lay groping for his revolver,—it had fallen from its case. Then—all was over.

Not yet; not yet. His ear catches the sound of a voice he knows well,—a rich, ringing, Hibernian voice it is: "Lieutenant, *lieutenant*. *Where* are ye?" and he has strength enough to call, "This way, sergeant, this way," and in another moment O'Grady, with blended anguish and gratitude in his face, is bending over him. "Oh, thank God you're not kilt, sir!" (for when excited O'Grady *would* relapse into the brogue); "but are ye much hurt?"

"Badly, sergeant, since I can't fight another round."

"Then put your arms round my neck, sir," and in a second the little Patlander has him on his brawny back. But with only one arm by which to steady himself, the other hanging loose, the torture is inexpressible, for O'Grady is now bounding down the hill, leaping like a goat from rock to rock, while the Apaches with savage yells come tearing after them. Twice, pausing, O'Grady lays his lieutenant down in the shelter of some large boulder, and, facing about, sends shot after shot up the hill, checking the pursuit and driving the cowardly footpads to cover. Once he gives vent to a genuine Kilkenny "hurroo" as a tall Apache drops his rifle and plunges headforemost among the rocks with his hands convulsively clasped to his breast. Then the sergeant once more picks up his wounded comrade, despite pleas, orders, or imprecations, and rushes on.

"I cannot stand it, O'Grady. Go and save yourself. You *must* do it. I *order* you to do it." Every instant the shots and arrows whiz closer, but the sergeant never winces, and at last, panting, breathless, having carried his chief full five hundred yards down the rugged slope, he gives out entirely, but with a gasp of delight points down among the trees:

"Here come the boys, sir."

Another moment, and the soldiers are rushing up the rocks beside them, their carbines ringing like merry music through the frosty air, and the Apaches are scattering in every direction.

"Old man, are you much hurt?" is the whispered inquiry his brother-officer can barely gasp for want of breath, and, reassured by the faint grin on Mr. Billings's face, and a barely audible "Arm busted,—that's all; pitch in and use them up," he pushes on with his men.

In ten minutes the affair is ended. The Indians have been swept away like chaff; the field and the wounded they have abandoned are in the hands of the troopers; the young commander's life is saved; and then, and for long after, the hero of the day is Buxton's *bête noire*, "the worst man in the troop."

CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

CAPTAIN SANTA CLAUS.

By Captain Charles King,
U. S. A.

New York:
Harper Brothers.

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THERE was unusual commotion in the frontier mining town when the red stage, snow-covered and storm-beaten, lurched up in front of the Bella Union and began to disgorge passengers and mail. The crowd on the wooden sidewalk was of that cosmopolitan type which rich and recently discovered "leads" so surely attract: tough-looking miners; devil-may-care cow-boys with rolling hat-brims and barbaric display of deadly weapons; a choice coterie of gamblers with exaggerated suavity of manners; several impassive Chinamen (very clean); several loafing Indians (very dirty); a brace of spruce, clean-shaven, trim-built soldiers from the garrison down the valley; and the inevitable squad of "beats" with bleary eyes and wolfish faces infesting the doorways of the saloons, sublimely trustful of a community that had long ceased to trust them, and scenting eleemosynary possibilities in each new-comer.

But while the arrival of the stage was a source of perennial excitement in the business centre of Argentopolis, the commotion on this occasion was due to the tumultuous welcome given by a mob of school-children to a tall, bronzed, fiercely mustached party the instant he stepped, fur-clad, from the dark interior. Such an array of eager, joyous little faces one seldom sees. Big boys and wee maidens, they threw themselves upon him with shrill clamor and enthusiastic embraces, swarming about his legs as, with twinkling eyes and genial greeting, he lifted the little ones high in air and kissed their dimpled cheeks, and shook the struggling boys heartily by the hand, and was pulled this way and that way until eventually borne off in triumph toward the spick-span new shop, with its glittering white front and alluring display of fruit, pastry, and confectionery, all heralded forth under the grandiloquent but delusive sign, "Bald Eagle Bakery."

Upon this tumultuous reception Argentopolis gazed for some moments in wondering silence. When the transfer of the children and their willing captive to a point some dozen yards away rendered conversation a possibility, the spokesman of the sidewalk committee shifted his quid, and formulated in frontier phrase

"'COME BACK,' SAID THE CAPTAIN, REASSURINGLY."

the question which seemed uppermost in the public mind:

"Who 'n thunder's that?"

"That?" said the soldier addressed. "That's Captain Ransom. It's good times the kids 'll be having now."

"B'long to your rigiment?"

"Yes; Captain of 'B' troop. Been away on leave ever since we got here."

"Seems fond o' children," said the Argentopolitan, reflectively. "Got any of his own?"

"Nary. He b'longs to the whole crowd. The 'B' company fellers 'll be glad he's back. They think as much of him as the kids do."

"Good officer, eh?"

"You bet; ain't no better in the cavalry."

At this unequivocal endorsement from expert authority the eyes of Argentopolis again followed the big man in the fur overcoat. With three or four youngsters tugging at each hand, and a dozen revolving irregularly about him, he was striding across the street, keeping up a running fire of chatter with his thronging satellites. Soldier he was unquestionably. Tall, erect of carriage, broad of shoulder, deep of chest, with a keen, quick glance from under his heavy brows. Eyes full of light and fire, nose straight and prominent, a great mustache that hid the curves of his handsome mouth and swept out across the square and resolute jaws—a mustache that, like the wavy brown hair about the temples, was tingeing with gray. Strong white teeth glistened through the drooping thatch, and one or two merry dimples dotted his bronzed and weather-beaten cheeks.

Over on the neighboring side street, from the steps of the school-house, other children surveyed the group, and with envious eyes and watering mouths beheld the demolition of tarts and turnovers. Despite the keen and searching cold of the mountain air, rare and still and brimming with ozone as November days can ever find it, the school shoved its hands deep in trousers pockets and stared with all its youthful might.

Even so blessed a half-hour must have its end, and as the warning bell began to ring, and the Townies to shout that "reecess" was over, the merry throng, spoil-laden, came pouring down the bakery steps, with many admonitions to their big benefactor not to think of starting for the fort until school was out and they could escort him home. Two or three of the smallest still clung to him, explaining that only the big ones had afternoon school; *they* were all through; they had nothing to do until the ambulance came to take them all at four o'clock; and the Captain became suddenly aware of two little people standing on the sidewalk and regarding him wistfully. One was a sturdy boy of seven, with frank blue eyes and chubby rounded cheeks—a picture of solid young America despite the fact that his little fists were red and bare; his knickerbockers, though well fitting, were worn and patched; and the copper toes of his cheap, heavy boots were wearing suspiciously thin. He stood protectingly by a little maiden, whose face was like those of Sir Joshua Reynolds' seraphs—a face as pure an oval as ever sculptor modelled or painter limned, with great, lustrous, long-lashed eyes and delicate and dainty features, and all about it tumbled a wealth of glistening golden hair, and all over it shone the look of childish longing and almost piteous entreaty. One little mittened hand was clasped in her brother's; the other, uncovered, hung by a finger in her rosy mouth. She was warmly clad; her little cloak and hood were soft and white and fleecy; her pigmy legs were cased in stout worsted, and her feet in warm "arctics," and "mother's darling" was written in every ornament of her dress.

Ransom, stowing away a handful of silver, came suddenly upon this silent pair, and stopped short. Another instant and he had stooped, raised the younger child in his strong hands, and with caressing tone accosted her:

"Why, little Snow-drop, who are you? What a little fairy you are!"

"She ain't one of us," piped up a youthful patrician, disdainfully. "She's infantry. He's her brother, and they don't belong to the fort."

The boy's face flushed, and he looked reproachfully at the speaker, but said no word. Ransom was gazing with singular intentness into the downcast face of his little captive.

"Won't you tell me your name, little one?" he pleaded. "Why didn't you come in and have some tarts and turnovers with the others? I've got to run now and meet some other old fellows at the stage office. Here, little man," he

said, as he set her down, "take Snow-drop in for me, and you two just eat all you can, and you pay for it for me." He held out a bright half-dollar. Snow-drop's eyes glistened, and she looked eagerly at her brother.

But the boy hung back. For an instant he hesitated, screwing his boot toe into a convenient knot-hole as means of covering his embarrassment. "Come, Jack," said the Captain, reassuringly, touching him on the shoulder. The little fellow shook his head.

"Why not, my boy?" pleaded Ransom. "Papa won't mind, when you tell him it was old Uncle Hal. That's what they call me."

A lump rose in the youngster's throat. His head went lower.

"It—it's mamma wouldn't like it," he finally said; and just then, with rush and sputter of hoofs, two officers came trotting around the corner, threw themselves from their saddles, pounced upon their comrade, and overwhelmed him with joyous greeting. Another minute and others arrived, and between them all he was led away up the street. While some of the children confidently followed, two remained behind: little Snow-drop, refusing to be comforted, was applying the back of her mittened hand to her weeping eyes, and turning a deaf ear to her manful brother, who was vainly striving to explain matters.

"Maudie Carleton's crying because Phil wouldn't take the money and get her some goodies," said little Jack Wilkins, in an opportune pause.

"Whom did you say?" asked Ransom, turning suddenly, and looking inquiringly at his friends. There was an instant of embarrassment. Then one of the officers replied:

"Maud Carleton, Ransom. Those are poor Phil Carleton's little ones."

"Wait for me at the office, fellows; I'll be along in a minute," was the response; and the Captain went striding back to the Bald Eagle.

It was an old story in the cavalry. Very few there were who knew not that Captain Ransom was a hard-hit man when Kate Perry—the beauty of her father's regiment—came back from school, and with all the wealth of her grace and loveliness and winning ways, refusing to see how she had impressed one or two "solid" men of the garrison, fell rapturously in love with Philip Carleton, the handsome, dashing scapegrace of the subalterns. It was "hard lines" for old Colonel Perry; it would have been misery to her devoted mother; but she was spared it all—the grass had been growing for years over her distant grave.

The wedding was a glitter of gold-lace, champagne glasses, and tears. Every one wished her—and him—all happiness, but dreaded the future. There was a year of bliss, and little Phil was born; another year when she was much taken up with her baby boy, and the father much abroad—a year of clouds and silence. Then came sudden call to the field, and one night with reeling senses she read the despatch that told her he was shot dead in battle with the Sioux. When little Maudie came there was no father to receive her in his arms. The gray-haired Colonel took the widow and her children a few short years to his own roof; then he, too, was called to his account, and with a widow's pension and the relic of her father's savings the sorrowing woman moved from the garrison that had so long been her home, and took up arms against her sea of troubles. She need not have gone. All Fort Rains knew that there were officers who would gladly have taken her and her beautiful children to their fireside. But she was loyal, proud, high-spirited, and she could not stay. All the roof her father had to leave her was the frame cottage at the ranch he had bought and stocked, a mile below the fort. She was a soldier's daughter, brave and resolute, she had her father's old soldier-servant and his wife to help her, and she moved to the ranch, and declared she would be dependent on no one. When first she had come into that glorious valley, a girl of eighteen, a large force of cavalry was encamped around the garrison in which her father's regiment of foot was stationed, and Captain Harold Ransom became one of her most devoted admirers, though nearly twice her age. Few men had much chance against such a lover as Phil Carleton, buoyant, brilliant, gallant, the pride of all the juniors in the infantry, the despair of many a prudent mother, and when that engagement was announced, the cavalry were rather glad to be ordered away, and to comfort themselves with the perilous distractions of Indian fighting for three or four stirring years. But, before they left, Ransom and others

had bought much of the land on which Argentopolis gleamed to-day. Perhaps it was the silver that came into his hair as well as his pockets, but silver did not cause the lines that crept under his kindly eyes and around the corners of the firm mouth. He was rich, as army men go, but his heart was sorely wrenched. He went abroad when the Indian campaigns were over, and rejoined while his comrades were on the Pacific coast, and became the delight of the children and the children's mothers. Captain Santa Claus they called him at Walla Walla and Vancouver, where he was the life of those garrisons; and while men honored and women waxed sentimental toward him, it was the children who took possession of the tall soldier and made his house their home, who trooped unbidden all over it at any hour of the day, and made it the garrison play-ground when the rainy season set in and drove them to cover.

And then, after their four years in the Columbia country, the regiment crossed the big range, and, wonder of wonders, head-quarters and six troops, one of them Ransom's, were ordered to Fort Rains! He was again on long leave when the change of station occurred, and the widow drew a long breath. She found life very different, with her father's old friends and hers removed. As the children grew in years their needs increased. She sold the stock and much of the land of the ranch, keeping only the homestead and the patch around it, but she was glad to find employment at the fort as teacher of the piano and singing. She played well, but her voice was glorious, and had been carefully trained. The news that he was coming had given her a shock. It was more than eight years since she had seen him. It was more than five since she had briefly answered the letter he wrote her on hearing of her husband's death. It was so manly, sympathetic, and so full of something he knew not how to express—a longing to shield her from want or care. She had gently but firmly ended it all.

And yet— She was bitterly poor now. Handsomer than ever, said the officers who knew her in the old days; still wearing her mourning, and looking so tall and majestic in her rusting weeds. She was a woman whose form and carriage would be noticeable anywhere — tall, slender, graceful, with a certain slow, languorous ease of motion that charmed the senses. Her face was exquisite in contour and feature—a pure type of blond, blue-eyed, Saxon beauty, with great masses of shimmering golden brown hair. No wonder Ransom felt a thrill when he looked into Maudie's eyes: the child was her mother in miniature. At twenty-seven, with all her trials, Mrs. Carleton was a lovelier woman than in her maiden radiance at eighteen. What she had gained in strength and character, through her years of poverty and self-abnegation, God alone knew, and He had been her comforter.

For nearly a year the garrison children had been going in to town for school, an excellent teacher having been secured in the East, and Mrs. Carleton eagerly embraced the chance of sending hers. She could no longer afford a nurse to look after the wee one. She could not take her on her daily round of lessons, and her infantry friends had gladly seen to it that the little Carletons were carried to and fro with their own. So, too, when the cavalry came had Colonel Cross assured her that the ambulance should always come for them and bring them back to the post. Everybody wanted to be kind to her, or said so at least; but the ladies were all new and strange. She had never been the pet among them she was in her own regiment. They had not known and loved her father, as had the Colonel. They had heard of handsome Phil Carleton, as who had not? but they had heard of Hal Ransom's old-time devotion to her, and now he would soon be back. Rich, growing gray, everybody's friend, the children's idol—oh! what if she should set that widow's cap for him now! The possibility was appalling.

And Christmas was coming, and the children had been weaving glowing pictures of the bliss to be theirs because Captain Santa Claus was homeward bound, and little Maud was listening with eager ears, and her blue-eyed brother in silent longing. The boy was his mother's knight and champion. She took him into her confidence and told him many of her troubles, and time and again after Maudie was asleep the two were rocking in the big arm-chair in front of the hearth, the little fellow curled up in her lap, his arms around her neck, his ruddy cheek nestled against hers, that looked so fragile and white by contrast. He knew how hard a struggle mamma was having in keeping the wolf from the door, and he

was helping her—little hero that he was—wearing uncomplainingly the patched knickerbockers and cowhide boots, bearing in soldier silence the thoughtless jeers of his school-mates, and taking comfort in the fact that sensitive little Maud was always prettily dressed. She had been petted from babyhood, for scarlet-fever had left her weak and nervous.

And so the coming of glad Christmas-tide was not to them the source of boundless joy it seemed to others. For days Maud had been coming home from school full of childish prattle about the lovely things the other girls were going to have. Couldn't she have a real wax doll, with "truly" eyes and hair, that could sing and say mamma; and a doll house, with kitchen, and a real pump and stove in it, and dining-room and parlor, and lots of lovely bedrooms upstairs; and a doll carriage like Mabel Vane's, with blue cushions, and white wheels and body, and umbrella top? She was tired of her old dollies and her broken wagon. Why didn't people ever give her such beautiful things? If she was very good, and wrote to Santa Claus, wouldn't he bring her what she wanted so very, very much? Poor Mrs. Carleton! Do our hearts ever ache over our own troubles as they do over the longings of our little ones? She promised Maud that Santa Claus should bring the very things she craved, and now she knew not how to fulfil her pledge. Commissary and butcher bills were still unpaid, and she so hated to ask even for what was due her! It is such an old, homely, heart-worn story—that of Christmas yearnings that must be unfulfilled! We lay down our cherished plans with a sigh of resignation, but when baby eyes and baby lips are pleading, God forgive us if we are not so humbly patient, if we accept our burden not without a murmur, or yield not without a struggle!

She had other sore perplexities. She well knew she must meet Hal Ransom. Two days had elapsed since Phil had told her of the reception accorded him, and Maud had preferred her complaint against her brother for being so mean to her in not taking the money and giving her a treat.

Heaven! how the widowed soul hugged her boy to her bosom that night, and kissed and blessed and cried over him! Come what might, he should have a Christmas worth remembering, for his remembrance of her! She had long planned to send to Chicago for a handsome suit to replace the worn and outgrown knickerbockers. It would have crushed her to think of her boy's taking money from him, of all people, no matter what the Forties did. Then came the question as to how she would meet him. Go to the fort she had to every day, and meet they must. It was not that he would be obtrusive; he was too thorough a gentleman for that, and her last letter to him was such that he could not be. It was written in the ecstasy of her bereavement, when she was hiding even from herself the faults and neglects of the buried Philip to whom she had given her girlish love. With lofty spirit she had told him she lived only to teach her children to revere their father's memory, and that she could never think of accepting aid from any one, though she thanked him for the delicacy and thoughtfulness of his well-meant offer. She had asked herself many a time in the last year whether, if it were to be done again, she could find it in her heart to be quite so cold and repellent. She wondered if he had ever heard that the last year of her handsome Philip's life had been devoted more to other women than to her. She could not tolerate the idea that he, above all, should suppose that between Philip and herself all had not been blissful, and that she had been neglected not a little. And yet—and yet was she unlike other women that just now her toilet received rather more thought than usual, and that she wondered would he find her faded—changed?

They met, as men and women whose hearts hold weightier secrets must meet, with the ease and cordiality which their breeding demands. Scene there was none; but she saw, and saw instantly, what she had vainly striven to teach herself she was utterly indifferent to, that in his eyes she was no more faded than his love in hers. She could have scourged herself for the thrill of life and youth it gave her.

That night little Philip was hugged closer than ever. He had been telling her how the Captain was moving into his new quarters, and the children trooped over there the moment they got back from school, and would not ask them, because they were infantry, and Maud cried, and the Captain himself came out and took her in his arms and carried her, and made him come too, and they all had nuts and raisins and apples, and the Captain was

just as kind to them as though they were cavalry—"more too, for he kept Maudie on his knee most of the time, and wanted us to stay, but we had to go and meet mamma. And he said that was what made him proud of me from the first, because I was so true to you, mamma," said Phil. "I suppose because I wouldn't take his half-dollar."

She was silent a moment, pressing her lips to his cheek, and striving hard to subdue the tears that rose to her eyes. She had something to ask of her boy that was hard, very hard. Yet it had to be done.

"You were right, Philip. It would have hurt mamma more than words can tell had you taken money from—from any one. We are very poor, but we can be rich in one thing—independence. Mamma has not had much luck this year. It seemed all to go with papa's old regiment. But we'll be brave and patient, you and mamma, and say nothing to anybody about our troubles. We'll pay what we owe as we go along. Won't we, Phil?"

"I wish I could help some way, mamma."

"You can, my soldier boy."

He looked up quickly and patted her cheek; then threw his arm around her neck again. Something told him what it would have to be.

"Maudie is a baby who cannot realize our position. Philip is my brave little knight and helper. It—it is so hard for mamma to say it, my boy, but if we buy what she so longs for at Christmas, there will be nothing left for the skates, and I know how you want them, and how many other things you ought to have. You have helped mother so often, Phil. Can you help her once more?"

For all answer he only clung to her the closer.

And now holiday week was near at hand. It was Friday, and school would close that afternoon, and for two blessed, blissful weeks there would be no session at all. Christmas Day would come on Tuesday, and the Forties were running riot in the realms of anticipation. They hugged each other and danced about the street when the express agent told them of the packages that were coming almost every day for Captain Ransom, and the little Townies, who were wont to protest they were glad their papas weren't in the army, were beginning to show traitorous signs of weakening. It was a sore test, if every regiment had its own Santa Claus, as the Forties said.

And older heads were noting that for some time Captain Ransom drove not so much townward, up the valley as down; and that there was a well-defined sleigh track from the lower gate over to "the ranch." Officers coming up from the stables were quick to note the new feature in the wintry landscape, and to make quizzical comment thereon. Then, on Sunday, the third in Advent, a heavy snow-storm came up during the morning service, and the wind blew a "blizzard." It was only a few weeks after the Captain's arrival, but his handsome roans were well known in the valley already, and the ladies looked at each other and nodded significantly as they saw the team drawn up near the chapel door when the congregation came shuddering out into the cold. Mrs. Colonel Cross, who had a charming young sister visiting her for the holidays, and Mrs. Vane, whose cousin Pansy had come over from her brother's station at Fort Whittlesey, had both offered Ransom seats in their pews until he chose his own; but he had chosen his own very promptly, and it was well down the aisle opposite that to which Mrs. Carleton had humbly retired after her father's death. As a consequence the higher families reached the door only in time to see the Captain bundling the widow and her little ones in his costly robes, and driving away through the whirling storm.

That night the wind died away; the snow fell heavily, and all the next day it lay in silent, unruffled, unfurrowed beauty over the broad level below the fort, and though the Captain's sleigh went townward toward evening, and the butcher's "bob" tore an ugly groove along the lower edge, there was now no trail other than the foot-path along the willow-fringed river-bank joining the garrison with the widow's gate. When Friday came, and the plain was still unfurrowed, Fort Rains was unanimous in its conclusion: Captain Ransom had offered himself again, and been rejected.

The households of Vane and Potts, and the ladies at least at the Colonel's, breathed freer. Captain Ransom was invited to Christmas dinner at all three places, and begged to be excused. He explained that he purposed having all the children at his house from eight to ten for general frolic that evening: and would not

the ladies come over and see the fun? Mrs. Vane and "Pansy" were for changing their dinner hour to five o'clock, if thereby the Captain could be secured, and Vane "sounded" him, but without the hoped-for result. He would have to be at home, he said. Mrs. Carleton was narrowly watched. Women who had been disposed to treat her coldly could have hugged her now, if they could be sure she had really refused the best catch in the cavalry, and left a chance for some one else. But Mrs. Carleton gave no sign, and she was a woman they dared not question. What staggered the theory of renewed offer and rejection was the warmth and cordiality of manner with which they met in public—and they met almost daily. There was something that seemed to shatter the idea of rejection in the very smile she gave him, and in the reverence of his manner toward her. Estrangement there certainly was none, and yet he had been going over to the ranch every day, and his visits had suddenly ceased. Why? They scanned his face for indications; but, as Mrs. Vane put it, "he always was an exasperating creature; you could no more read him than you could a mummy."

Monday before Christmas had come, and Colonel Cross, trudging home from his office about noon, caught sight of the tall and graceful figure of Mrs. Carleton coming toward him along the walk. He was about to hail her in his cheery style, when he saw that her head was bowed, and that she was in evident distress. Even while he was wondering how to accost her, she put him out of doubt. Her lips were twitching and her cheeks were flushed; tears were starting in her eyes, but she strove hard to command herself and speak calmly.

"You were so kind as to order the 'special' for me this morning, Colonel, but I shall not need it: I cannot go to town."

He knew well that something had gone wrong. Blunt, rugged old trooper that he was, he had been her father's intimate in their cadet days, and he wanted to befriend her. More than a little he suspected that hers was not a path of roses among the ladies at Rains. In his presence they were on guard over their tongues, but he had not been commanding officer of several garrisons for nothing.

"Mrs. Carleton," he impetuously spoke, "something's amiss. Can't you tell an old fellow like me, and let me—ah—settle things? Surely it is something I can do."

She thanked him warmly. It was nothing in which he could be of service, she declared, trying hard to smile: she was a little upset and could not go to town. But he saw she had just come from Mrs. Vane's, and he knew that estimable and virtuous woman thoroughly, and drew his conclusions. Whatever was wrong, it was not unconnected with her monitions or ministrations—of that he was confident. As for Mrs. Carleton, she turned quickly from the fort and took her lonely, winding way among the willows to her valley home, a heart-sick woman.

Counting her ways and means, she had found that to pay for the items she had promised Maud and had ordered for her boy—the latter being the suit sent "C. O. D." from Chicago—she would have to ask a favor of her patrons at the fort. She had arranged with the proprietor of the big variety store in town that he should set aside for her a certain beautiful doll and one of the prettiest of the doll carriages, and that she would come and get them on this very afternoon. To meet her bills and these expenses, and that there might be no disappointment, she had addressed to the parents of her few pupils a modest little note, enclosing her bill, and asking as a kindness to her that it might be paid by Saturday, the 22d. Courteous and prompt response had come from all but two, and with the money thus obtained she had settled her little household accounts. Mrs. Vane and Mrs. Potts, however, had vouchsafed no reply, and it was to the mothers, not the fathers, her notes had been addressed. On Monday morning, therefore, when she went to give Miss Adèle her lesson, she ventured to ask for Mrs. Potts, and Mrs. Potts was out—spending the day at Mrs. Vane's. So thither she went, and with flushing cheeks and deep embarrassment inquired if the ladies had received her notes. Mrs. Potts had, and was overcome, she said, with dismay. She had totally forgotten, and thought it was next Saturday she meant; and now the Captain had gone to town, and there was no way she could get at him. Then came Mrs. Vane's turn. Mrs. Vane, too, had received her note, but she was not overcome. With much majesty of mien she told the widow that she always paid her bills on

the last day of the quarter, and that her husband was so punctilious about it and so methodical that she never asked him to depart from the rule. Mrs. Carleton strove hard to keep down her pride and the surging impulse to cry out against such heartless superiority of manner and management. There was a tinge of reproach in the plea she forced herself to make for her babies' sake. "You know there are no more lessons this term, Mrs. Vane; my work is done; and I—so needed it for Christmas, or I would not have asked." And she smiled piteously through the starting tears. Mrs. Vane was sorry —very sorry. She could hardly ask her husband to depart from his life-long practice, even if he were here—and he, too, had gone to town.

Yes, everybody seemed to have gone or sent to town for Christmas shopping. Her little ones were alone in having no one to buy for them. Harold Ransom too was going, for she saw the handsome roans come dashing up the drive, as she rose, with a burning sense of indignity, to take her leave. She came upon Miss Pansy in the hallway, all hooded and furred, and beaming with bliss at the prospect of a sleigh-ride to town—behind the roans, no doubt. Never mind that now. Her heart was full of only one thought—her babies. Where were now her long-cherished schemes? All Fort Rains was blithe and jubilant over the coming festivities; Maud was wild with anticipation; and she alone—she alone, who had worked so hard and faithfully that her children might find joy in their Christmas awaking—she alone had seen her hopes turn to ashes. In her pride and her vehement determination to be "beholden" to no one, she would seek no help in her trouble. She went home, asking only to be alone, thankful that the children were spending the day with friends in the garrison, and could not be there to see the misery in her eyes.

Full an hour she gave to her uncontrollable grief, locked in her room, sobbing in utter prostration. Her eyes were still red and swollen; she was weak, trembling, exhausted, when the sudden sound of hoof-beats roused her. The blood flew to her cheeks. Despite her prohibition, then, he was here. He had come again, and something told her he had fathomed her trouble, and would not be denied. She heard the quick, firm tread upon the steps, the imperative rat-tat-tat of the whip-handle on the door. She could have called to her faithful slave Mrs. Malloy, the "striker's" wife, who had known her from babyhood, and bidden her tell the Captain she must be excused, but it was too late. Bridget Malloy had seen her face when she came home; had vainly striven to enter her room and share her sorrow; had shrewdly suspected the cause of the trouble, and through the key-hole had poured forth voluble Hibernian fealty and proffers of every blessed cent of her savings, but only to be implored to go away and let her have her cry in peace. Even had Mrs. Carleton ordered her to deny her to the visitor, it is probable that Mrs. Malloy would have obeyed—her own instincts.

"Sure it's glad I am to see the Captain!" was her prompt greeting; "and it was a black day that ever let ye go from her. Come right in, an' I'll call her to ye. It's all broke up she is."

And so she had to come. There he stood in the little sanctuary where Philip in photographed beauty beamed down upon her from over the mantel, and Philip's rusting sword hung like that of Damocles by the fragile thread of sentiment that bound her to the past. There he stood with such a world of tenderness, yearning, sympathy, and suppressed and passionate love in his dark eyes! She came in, almost backward, striving to hide her swollen and disfigured face. He never strove to approach her. With one hand on the mantel, he stood gazing sorrowfully at her. With one hand on the door-knob, with averted face, she silently awaited his words.

"I have disobeyed you, Kate, though I left my sleigh and came on Roscoe. I have tried to accept what you said eight days ago, but no man on earth who has heard what I have heard to-day could obey you longer. No. Listen!" he urged, as she half turned, with silencing gesture. "I'm not here to plead for myself, but—my heart is breaking to see you suffering, and to think of your being subjected to such an outrage as that of this morning. Of course I heard of it. I made them tell me. The Colonel had seen your distress, and told me you had abandoned the trip to town. I found out the rest. Yes, Mrs. Carleton, if you so choose to term it" (for she had turned with indignant query in her eyes), "I *pried* into your affairs. Do

you think I can bear this, to know you are in want—for want it must be, or you'd never have stooped to ask that vulgar, purse-proud, patronizing woman for money? Do you think I can live here and see you subjected to this? By Heaven! If nothing else will move you, in Philip's name, in your children's name, let me lift this burden from you. Send me across the continent if you like. I'll promise to worry you no more, if that will buy your trust. I've lived and borne my lot these eight or nine long years, and can bear it longer if need be. What I can't bear, and won't bear, is your suffering from actual *poverty*. Kate Carleton, won't you trust me?"

"How *can* I be your debtor, Captain Ransom? Ask yourself—ask any one—what would be said of me if I took one cent from you! I *do* thank you. I *am* grateful for all you have done and would do. Oh, it is not that I do not bless you every day and night for being so thoughtful for me, so good to my little ones! It wasn't for myself I was so broken to-day; it was for my—my babies. Oh, I—I *cannot* tell you!"

And now she broke down utterly, weeping hysterically, uncontrollably. In the abandonment of her grief she threw her arms upon the wooden casing of the doorway, and bowed her head upon them. One instant he stood there, his hands fiercely clinching, his broad chest heaving, his bronzed, honest, earnest face working with his weight of emotion, and then, with uncontrollable impulse, with one bound he leaped to her side, seized her slender form in his arms, and clasped her to his breast. In vain she struggled; in vain her startled eyes, filled with resolute loyalty to the old faith, blazed at him through their mist of tears: he held her close, as once again, despite her struggles and her forbidding words, he poured forth his plea.

"You *can* take it, you *must* take it. For your own sake, for your children's sake—even for his!—give me the right to protect and cherish you. I—I don't ask your love. Ah, Kate, be merciful!" and then—fatal inspiration!—but the face he loved was so—so near; he never would have done it had he thought: it was only as utterly unconquerable an impulse as his wild embrace; his lips were so tremulous with entreaty, with love, sympathy, pleading, pity, passion, everything that impelled and nothing that restrained, that with sudden sweep they fell upon her flushed and tear-wet cheek, and ere he knew it he had kissed her.

There was no mistaking the wrath in her eyes now. She was free in an instant, and bidding him begone. He begged hard for pardon, but to no purpose. She would listen to nothing. Go he must—his presence was insult. And he left her panting with indignation, a vengeance-hurling goddess, a wild-eyed Juno, while he at full gallop went tearing through the snow-drifts, recklessly, dolefully, yet determinedly, back to the post. In half an hour he was whipping to town.

When sunset came, and the evening gun awakened the echoes of the snow-shrouded valley, and the red disk went down behind the crested bluffs far up the stream, a sleigh came out from the fort, and Captain Vane, with curious mixture of cordiality and embarrassment, restored Phil and Maud to the maternal roof, and begged to hand her the amount due from him and from Captain Potts for family tuition. He had only heard a—accidentally—a few minutes before, of her request. And wasn't there something else he could do? Would she not go to town with him to-morrow morning? She thanked him. She hardly knew what to do. Here was the money at last, but it was Christmas Eve now, and there was no time to be lost, and town lay full six miles away. Perhaps she wished a messenger now, suggested the Captain—he would send in a mounted man gladly. Knowing no other way to secure her treasures for her little ones, she breathlessly accepted his offer, briefly explained the situation, and told him how she longed to have the presents there, with the trifles she had made for them, to greet their eyes with the coming day. The messenger could go to the store and get the coveted doll and carriage; there would surely be sleighs from the fort that would bring them out for him, and he would find the box from Chicago at the express office, and could pay the charges and sign the receipt on her written order to the agent. It was arranged in a moment, and with reviving hope she gave the children their tea and strove to get them early to bed.

Ten o'clock came. The little ones were at last asleep. She had filled the stockings with such inexpensive but loving remembrances as she could afford, and had

"ONE MOMENT MORE AND HER BIGGEST LANTERN SWUNG GLOWING IN THE WINDOW."

tottered dangerously near the brink of another flood of tears, when Malloy and his wife came in, the one with a box of tools for Phil, the other with a set of china for the doll house. She had finally bidden those faithful friends good-night, and having arranged the few gifts she had for the children, she threw over her shoulders a heavy shawl, and went to the gate to listen for the messenger's return.

It was a perfect night—clear, still, and sparkling. The moon shone brightly upon the glistening mantle of snow, and tinged with silver the pine crests across the stream. Westward, on a little rise, were the twinkling lights of the fort. Far beyond, far up the narrowing valley, other lights, dim and distant, marked the position of the town. She could hear the faint, muffled sound of shots with which the benighted but jubilant frontiersmen were hailing the coming of the sacred anniversary, like some midwinter Fourth of July, with exuberant and explosive hilarity. Then, nearer at hand, soft, sweet, and solemn, there floated out over the valley the prolonged notes of the cavalry trumpet sounding the signal "Lights

out," the "good-night" of the garrison. Then all the broad windows of the barracks were shrouded in sudden gloom; only in the quarters of the officers, on the opposite side of the parade, were the lights still twinkling. In one of them, nearest the gate, high up aloft, and close under the gables, there gleamed a brighter light than all the others. Even in the chilly air she felt the flush of blood to her cheeks. That was Ransom's house. She well knew he had chosen it, farthest from the quarters and stables of his troop, simply because it was at the end of the row, overlooking the valley, and nearest her. Two weeks since he had said to her that he could not rid himself of the thought of her isolation. Though off the beaten track a full three-quarter mile, and within long carbine range of the sentries, she was still far away, almost unprotected. Though Indians were no longer to be feared, there were such things as tramps and blackguards in the settlements. She laughed at his fears. She had lived there three years, and never heard a sound at night other than the occasional howl of a coyote and the distant watch-cry of the sentries. She had brave old Malloy with his gun, and Bridget with her tongue and nails; she had Philip's sword, her own brave spirit, and her boy: what had she to fear?

All the same, struggle against it though she would, it was sweet to hear his anxious questioning. Even if unmolested by marauders, something might go wrong—Maudie have croup, a kerosene lamp burst. She might need help. Who knew? "I shall put a bright lamp and reflector in the little round garret window every night as soon as I get home," he said, "and should you ever be in danger or need, throw a red handkerchief over your biggest lantern, and show it at the top window. If the sentries don't see it at once, fire Malloy's gun." She promised, laughingly, though repudiating the possibility. She had told herself that Philip's spirit was all the protection she needed; but the night landscape of the valley, the night lights at the fort, had acquired of late an interest they never knew before. She would have scourged herself had she believed, she would have stormed at any one who suggested, that she went to look for his light; but if ever it failed to be there, at ten or eleven or later, she knew it. Whatever might be his evening occupation at the fort—a dinner, a card party, officers' school, "noncoms.'" recitation—it was his habit on reaching home to go at once to the garret and post his sentinel light. What would he not have given for an answering signal?

And there was the light now. He was home, then, and despite her anger and his banishment, he was faithful. Christmas Eve, and only ten, and he was home and watching over her. She was still quivering with wrath at him for that ravished kiss—at least she told herself she was, and had told him a great deal more. Was it quite fair to drive him from her home, as she had, when Phil was so fond of him and Maudie loved him so, and he was so devoted to them? What could he be doing at home so early? There was a party at the Adjutant's, she knew. She had been obliged to decline. She had three invitations for Christmas dinners, and had said no to all, gratefully. There were many who wanted to be kind to her, but she had only one dress she considered fit to wear, so too had little Maud, and as for her brave boy Phil, he had nothing—unless the suit from Chicago came in time. Without that he could not go to the Captain's Christmas tree. Why did not the messenger return? She was becoming feverishly anxious.

It was too cold to remain out-of-doors. She re-entered, and paced fitfully up and down her little parlor. She went in and bent over her sleeping children, and rearranged the coverlets with the noiseless touch of the mother's hand; she leaned over and kissed them softly, and now that her surcharged nature had had free vent, and the skies were cleared by the morning's storm, she felt far gentler, happier. Her cry had done her good. Her hopefulness was returning—but not the messenger. What *could* detain him? Where could he be? It was eleven, and long after, when at last she sighted a shadowy horseman loping across the moonlit plain, and slowly he dismounted at her gate and came to her—empty-handed. He was a soldier of Vane's troop, and his tale was doleful. He had been set upon in a saloon, robbed, and beaten. The money was gone, he had brought back nothing but bruises. As consolation he imparted the fact that 'twas too late to get the doll and carriage. The last ones had been sold that evening, as she had not come to

claim them. Then he had stepped in to take a drink, because he was cold, and then the catastrophe had occurred. True or false as might be the story, there was no doubt of the veracity of that portion which referred to the drink. Conscious that it was too late to do anything at this hour, she simply dismissed him, bidding him go at once to the post, barred and locked her door, and sat down, stunned and heart-sick. This, then, was the joyous Christmas for which she had worked so long and hard! She raised her arms in one last appeal to Heaven; then threw herself upon her knees beside her little ones, and buried her face in her quivering hands. What would their early waking bring to them now but disappointment? For half an hour she knelt there helpless, stunned. Then lifted her head—startled.

Somebody was fumbling at the storm-door. With her heart in her throat, she listened, incredulous, fearful, then convinced. The boards creaked and snapped beneath a heavy, stealthy tread. She heard beyond doubt a muttered question, a reply. There were two of them, then! All was darkness in her parlor now, only the light burned in the children's room. Her heart bounded, but she stole, despite trembling knees, noiselessly, into the parlor, stooped, and peered through the slats, and, sure as fate, two men, burly, muffled so that they were unrecognizable, were bending down at the storm-house in front of her parlor door. Quickly she rose, scurried through the parlor, up the stairs to the room above the kitchen, where she rapped heavily at the door. "Malloy! Malloy!" she cried. No answer but a snore and heavy breathing. She rattled the knob and called again. This time with success.

"Who is't?" was the startled challenge.

"It is I—Mrs. Carleton! Quick, Malloy! Two men are trying to break in at the front door."

She heard the bound with which the old soldier leaped to the floor. She ran into the front room. One quick glance showed her Ransom's signal-light blazing across the mile of snow. One moment more, and muffled in red silk, her biggest lantern swung glowing in the window. Then down the stairs she hurried to her children, just as Malloy, with his carbine, and Bridget, with a six-shooter, swept gallantly into action. She heard his fierce summons, "Who shtands there?" and listened breathlessly. No response. "Who's dhere, I say?" Dead silence. Not even scurrying footsteps. She crept to the window and peered out. No one near. She raised the sash, threw open a shutter, and gazed abroad. The little piazza was deserted, unless both were hiding inside the storm-house. No! See! Over among the willows by the stream there are shadowy figures and a sleigh.

"They've gone, Malloy! They are up the river-bank with a sleigh!" she called. And then she heard him furiously unbarring the parlor door preparatory to a rush. She heard it swing open, an impetuous sally, a collision, a crash, the clatter of a dropped carbine against the resounding wood-work, a complication of anathemas and objurgations from the dark interior, and then a dialogue in choice Hibernian.

"Are ye hurted, Terence?"

"I am. Bad scran to the blagyards that left their thrunk behind 'em!"

Trunk! what trunk? She bore a light into the parlor, and revealed Malloy, with rueful visage, doubled up over a big wooden box planted squarely in the doorway. Robbers, indeed! Mrs. Bridget whisked him out of the way, ran and closed the children's door, and in another moment had lugged the big box into the parlor, and wrenched away the top. The two women were on their knees before it in an instant.

First they dragged forth a great flat paper box, damp and cool and moist, and this the widow opened tremblingly. A flat layer of white cotton, dry; then paper; a flat layer of white cotton, moist; and then, peep! Upon the fresh, green coils of smilax, rich with fragrance, sweet, moist, dewy, exquisite, lay store upon store of the choicest flowers—rose buds and rose blossoms in cream and yellow and pink and crimson, carnations in white and red, heliotrope and hyacinth, and fairest pansies, and modest little violets, and gorgeous tulips, even great callas—the first flowers she had seen in years. Oh, Captain Santa Claus! who taught you Christmas wooing! Where learned you such art as this? Beneath the box was yet another, bearing the stamp of the great Chicago firm, sealed, corded, just as he had got it from the agent that evening—Phil's longed-for suit. She hugged it with delight, while tears started to her

dancing eyes. How good he was! How thoughtful for her and for her little ones! There, beneath, was the very white doll carriage, blue lining, umbrella top, and all, wherein reposed a wondrous wax doll, the like of which Maud had never dreamed. There was a tin kitchen with innumerable appendages. There was a glistening pair of club skates of finest steel and latest patent, the very thing that Phil so longed for, and had so lovingly resigned. There were fur cap and gloves and boots for him, and such an elegant shawl for Mrs. Malloy! He could send them all he chose, and no offence. But to her—on her he could lavish only flowers.

And then her Irish allies returned to their slumbers, and left her to the rapture of arranging the new presents and the contemplation of her flowers; and she was hugging the big pasteboard box and gloating over her treasures when there was sudden noise without, a rush up the steps, and before she could drop her possessions the door flew open, and in came a wild-eyed, breathless captain of cavalry, gasping the apparently unwarrantable query, "What's the matter?"

For an instant she stared at him in astonishment. Holding tight her flowers, she gazed at his agitated face. "Nothing," she answered. "How could anything be wrong when you have been so—so—" But words failed her.

"Why! your red light's burning!" he explained.

"I declare! I forgot all about it!"

Then another silence. He threw himself back in an arm-chair, breathing hard, and striving to recover his composure.

"Do you mean—didn't you mean to signal for help?" he finally asked.

"Yes, I did"—an arch and mischievous smile now brightening her face. "When I swung it I wanted you to come quick and drive—yourself away."

Then she put down her box, and stepped impulsively toward him, two white hands outstretched, tears starting from her eyes, the color surging to her lovely face—"Where can I find words to thank you, Captain Santa Claus?"

He rose quickly, his face flushed and eager, his strong hands trembling.

"Shall I tell you?" he asked.

Her head was drooping now; her eyes could not meet the fervent love and longing in his; her bosom heaved with every breath. She could only stand and tremble when he seized her hands.

"Kate, will you take back what you said to-day?"

She stole one glance into his passionate, pleading eyes, and her head drooped lower.

"*Can't* you take it back, Kate?"

A moment's pause. At last the answer. "How can I, unless—unless you take back what you—what caused it?"

Never before had the little Carletons waked to such a radiant Christmas morning. Never had the Forties known so royal a Christmas tree. Never before was "Uncle Hal's" so thronged with beaming faces and happy hearts. But among all the little ones whom his love and thoughtfulness had blessed there was no face that shone with bliss more radiant, with joy more deep and perfect, than that of Captain Santa Claus.

ANTHONY OF PADUA.

BY HARRIET LEWIS BRADLEY.

THIS story with its simple rhyme,
This picture by a hand sublime,
Spring from a legend, in the time
Of Anthony of Padua.

Some doubt had cast its shadows strong
Upon the Saint, who well and long
Fought manfully to right this wrong—
Fought day and night in Padua.

Till in his arms, so it is told,
The Saint did his dear Lord enfold,
And there appeared a light like gold
From out the skies of Padua.

"O Christ Child, art thou come to me!
With wonder sweet I welcome Thee.
O Christ Child, can this wonder be!"
Cried Anthony of Padua.

"I thank Thee, Blessed One, for this.
Forgive what I have done amiss!
And let me greet Thee with a kiss,
Thou Dear One, come to Padua!"

"To him who struggles with his might
Our Lord has promised to bring light
And glory, as of lilies white,"
The angels sang in Padua.

BILLY RAY'S WEDDING.

A Buffalo correspondent says: "A well-know Buffalo boy some years since witnessed the military wedding in Milwaukee which was the prototype of the cavalry wedding in "Marion's Faith," one of the most popular of the delightful Army stories of Captain King. This was the marriage of Margaret Sanderson to Captain Otho W. Budd, Troop C, 4th Cavalry, which was held in a Milwaukee church in June, 1884. Captain and Mrs. King were both at this wedding. The Buffalo boy says that every item in King's account was given just as it occurred in Milwaukee. The amusing incident of Blake and the bridegroom, "Billy" Ray, finding the vestry door locked against them, the suggestion of Blake's that he heave a brick through the window, and crawl in at the risk of spoiling their uniforms, and the final act of the twain in going to the front of the church and clanking up a side aisle not a moment too soon for the ceremony are vouched for as having actually occurred. It might be interesting to add that the Buffalo boy who witnessed this wedding was Chauncy M. Depew, nephew and namesake of the President of the New York Central Railroad."

Army and Navy Journal.

THE COLONEL'S ORDERLY.

Flynn was a character, despite the fact that his discharge-papers couldn't vouch for it. He was a shock-headed Portlander, with an affiliation for whiskey and the guard-house, emerging thence between sprees with brilliant resolutions for reform and a determination to achieve greatness that lasted till next pay-day provided he couldn't get trusted meantime. Flynn had but one enemy in the garrison,—himself,—but outside the walls their name was legion. Two roads led to town; both roads were lined with groggeries, and "Red Rory," as the soldiers dubbed him, never succeeded in getting beyond the second corner. After the first drink all roads were as one to Mr. Flynn. All roads led to the guard-house, and, as Lieutenant Waterman villainously paraphrased it,—

"The path of Rory leads but to the gaol."

And yet, when Flynn wanted to, he "took orderly" four times out of five and nobody accused the adjutant of the faintest partiality, for as orderly for the commanding officer Private Flynn was the bane of the adjutant's existence. The colonel, on the contrary, was prouder of him than old Mr. Wardle of the fat boy of Dingley Dell. It was shrewdly suspected that the men used to turn to and contribute their efforts in dressing and equiping Flynn for the contest at guard-mounting, with the view of making his appearance absolutely beyond criticism; for Rory was a genuine "Handy Andy." His blunders were the glory of the garison, and it was believed that the old colonel used to manufacture perplexing messages for the express purpose of seeing how Flynn could distort them.

As orderly for the colonel, and when bearer of his messages, Private Flynn comported himself with a solemnity of demeanor and a machine-like precision that would have made him a "jewel of an undertaker." Between the post-surgeon and the colonel there existed a long-tried friendship. They sometimes sat up late together, and, as the result of such protracted sessions, the colonel had an occasional morning headache. The doctor disbelieved in cocktails, but had a specific in the shape of French cordial-bitters, labeled "Stomaquique," and generally alluded to by that questionable title. One balmy spring morning, as the bugles were ringing out the first call for guard-mounting, "full dress," and a bevy of young ladies, with their attendant beaus, had gathered on the parade to see the sights and do a limited amount of flirting before the officers should be summoned to the customary *matinée*, the doctor stopped in their midst, exchanging gay salutations with the party, when the noisy chatter was interrupted by the apparition of Flynn, erect, motionless, standing at right-hand salute.

"What is it, orderly?" asked a subaltern.

"Message from the colonel for the docther, sorr:" and silence fell upon the group, that he might deliver his message as the doctor faced him,—silence that gave place to a shout of irrepressible merriment before the doctor could escape.

"The curn'l's compliments to the docther, sorr, and wad he plaze sind him a dose of the sthummick ache?"

"*Matinée*" was unusually lively that day. C. K.

RIDING FOR GLORY

On the Back of the Lithe, Springy Thoroughbred,

How Captain King Rode for the Pride of America's Cavalry.

Written for the *Boston Sunday Globe*, by
Captain Charles King, U. S. A.

You say that an instance wherein the West Point preparation was shown to fit a man to ride successfully against experts of the turf would be of interest. That would imply an atom of doubt on the part of some of your readers as to the justice of the claim made by Mr. Roosevelt, and tacitly indorsed by myself in previous articles. This is no surprise. I expected it now, and encountered it 15 years ago. A man whom I had known in New York, and whom I next met at the beautiful old Metairie racecourse in New Orleans, came briskly forward one April morning in '72 and laughingly said, "You won't mind, I hope; I've bet my money against you. You may be a good cavalry rider, but these—why, they're all experts."

Now I shall have to tell the whole story, despite its being a personal affair, but if it serve to illustrate the principle referred to—well and good.

It was just before the spring meeting of the Metairie Jockey Club of New Orleans—somewhere towards the end of March, 1872—and a great concourse of prominent horsemen from all over the country was rapidly assembling. It was destined to be the final meeting on the finest course in the South, and the directors were eager to go out in a blaze of glory. The stables of Buford and Swigert of Kentucky, and of Sanford of New Jersey, were among the most notable on the ground, but every Southern stable of any consequence was represented. Ex-Governor Paul O. Herbert was then president of the Metairie. Generals Beauregard and Westmore were among its leading spirits; Lawrence Barrett sported its colors as an honored guest, so did Manton Marble of the New York World, then spending a month at the old Hotel St. Louis; LeGrand B. Cannon of New York was a daily visitor to look at the 'preliminary canters'; Cuthbert Slocomb of New Orleans was an enthusiastic member, and the invaluable Billy Connor was then one of the prominent track officers. It is the season of the year, too, when the quaint old city is crowded with tourists from the North and this spring of '72 was the gayest that had opened since the war.

Among the daily visitors at the club were two young foreigners, Monsieur George Rosenlecher of France and Count Victor Crenneville of Austria, both light cavalry officers in their own countries; both practiced riders in many a race at Longchamps, Baden Baden and Vienna ; both had brought with them their gorgeous silken "casques" (jockey shirts) and complete race rig ; both frequently exhibited photographs taken in their beautiful jockey dress, and both were eager at the coming meeting to ride a race against any American gentleman who could be induced to "pick up the gauntlet." For some time there were no takers. Then they offered to 'allow seven pounds' to any gentlemen who would ride against them, i. e., carry seven pounds dead weight on their saddles—a heavy penalty. Still no takers, and then there began to be some talk.

Just then I got back from duty on which I had been sent in northern Mississippi, and, reporting to General Emory, on whose staff I was serving as aide-de-camp spent the evening with him at the St. Louis Hotel, where all these prominent Metairie men happened to be gathered. Almost the first thing said to me was by Governor Herbert : "Why won't you ride against these foreign cavalrymen?" And in this way I first heard of the challenge. Little by little the whole story came out, and, turning to my chief—himself an enthusiastic old cavalry officer and horseman—I asked him if he thought I'd do. His answer was of such a character that the matter was settled then and there. An American was found to ride against the challengers from France and Austria, and though New Orleans society at that day would doubtless have preferred somebody other than a Yankee officer, still—that was better than nobody. Then, as the papers began to take the matter up and interest increased, some Englishmen came forward and said a young countryman of theirs was in town, and had with him the jockey dress in which he had ridden many a gentleman's race abroad. He would gladly ride for the Royals. Then in another day Ireland added her champion in a tall, slender young trooper, a capital fellow he proved to be, and all of a sudden it had become an international affair.

By the terms of the race it was to be known as the international race for gentlemen riders. A dash of a mile and 80 yards (so that the ladies' stand might have full benefit of both the start and finish.) Prize, the Metairie whip—gold mounted. The club to furnish the horses from the racers of the stables present, and these were to be assigned to riders according to weight. The first meeting of the five contestants, therefore, was the day we scaled at the club office with old Generals Westmore (the Admiral Rous of the Metairie) and Abe Buford of Kentucky, to supervise the ceremony. It was then found that I was the heaviest of the five by seven pounds, (weighing 143,) while Count Victor was a diminutive shadow, barely touching 112. I had to train down at once. It was arranged that we were to have horses ready for us at the judges' stand every morning at sunrise for track practice, etc. My associates rode in and out, but I arose every morning at 3, and in flannels and overcoat tramped, hard as I could, the seven miles from my quarters up on Prytania street out to the Metairie course at the end of Canal. Then, after an hour of brisk work in the saddle, tramped again back to town ; took a couple of chops and a pot of tea at Moreau's ; then went to the office for a rub down and the duties of the day. In one week I had trained down just seven pounds, and was in tip-top trim. In that week, too, I had learned a good deal about riding thoroughbreds, and that

it was infinitely easier, handier, prettier work than what I had been doing for a couple of years previous—teaching two to five hours a day all the practices at the West Point school of horsemanship, and doing it on any and every kind of a horse but a thoroughbred. After that experience I found riding these lithe, beautiful, springy creatures, no matter how they plunged or tried to "bolt," simply a delight.

Of course I had watched many a year the jockey seat and jockey hand, and knew that there was reason for it all. For an instant—the first day I mounted (under the eyes of a crowd of club men eager to watch the performance of the great horses gathered there for the races, and wildly curious to see how the "amateurs" would get along). I remember that the first thing I did was to slip the reins with my left hand—cavalry fashion—but while my "trainer" (the owner of the horse, but in no sense an instructor), was setting the stirrups under the instep—anything but cavalry fashion—and giving numerous orders to the stable boys hanging on to the head of my pawing, impatient steed. I slipped both hands forward down along the horse's neck gave the reins a couple of "flips" around both wrists so as to give plenty of friction against his hardest pull, and told the grooms to let go. In another minute we were off—a jockey from the same stable racing alongside on a big chestnut gelding. Three and four years previous, on my own beautiful "Tennessee" when with the old light battery with which I served in New Orleans just after the war, I had been allowed to speed over that elastic track, but delightful as that was it was tame work to this. I seemed simply skimming over the ground and whistling through the air at a rate I had never known before. It almost took my breath away—but it was delicious. Twice—thrice on different horses we were sent around that morning, and I had a mere bagatelle of a time in getting along with a big rangy specimen, against whom the trainers warned me, saying he was vicious and a "bolter"—but he ran like a streak.

Of course I wanted to know how my riding had impressed the experts. There was still time to get out of the thing if my cavalry seat was going to make a guy of me—so, after dismounting, I asked General Westmore for his advice. His answer was that he was ready to make his bets. Next the old trainer whose horses I had been trying said, quietly, "I didn't want to allow the use of my horses for this race, but if you'll ride one of mine I'll get first money."

Still I doubted. I found among my Northern acquaintances and among comrades on the staff (none of whom had been at West Point for many a long year) perfect willingness to bet anything I wouldn't win that race. On the other hand, the turfmen who were regularly out at the track at the sunrise gallops, and the officers of the club to whom I laughingly spoke of the matter, all expressed a wish to meet these doubting friends. It would not do to be the cause of putting them up to losing their money, so I deprecated betting in any way.

But even while tending strictly to his own practice, it is easy for a man to watch the style and work of fellows who come alongside. Stuart, the little Englishman, was the first of the five whom I had a good chance of seeing, and he was a very trim, business-like, thorough going rider. "A vast improvement on Lord Wxxdhxxs," said Westmore and others on the judges' stand, who were watching him as he came flying down the home stretch straight as horse could run. The young lord referred to had been over a year or two before, and had, so they said, "ridden all over his horse." Roschlecher also was a

pretty rider, though too high in the stirrups to suit me, and more than once I thought that the coach whom he had employed—a jockey with a beautiful seat and hand, but a shady record—was laughing in his sleeve at him. Crenneville I only saw in saddle twice before the race, and both times it struck me he was "too much in the air." Hearing a Mobile horseman commending the count's style and anxious to learn its special points as viewed by him. I asked his reasons.

"Why—he's so light? Never touches his horse's back. You would think he wasn't on him at all."

"Well—if that horse should suddenly shy or swerve he wouldn't be on him," was the answer that occurred to me but I said nothing at the moment. The next morning his horse did shy and the Austrian was thrown headlong. These three gentlemen had their coaches or trainers with them a great deal, but after the first day I preferred to allow no one to touch my horse.

Then came the announcement of the "mounts"– the horses we were to ride —and then I made my bets. Both of them against myself.

Of course, if riding could do it, I meant to win that race. There was every reason why I should. Pride in the fact that I was riding for America; pride in the fact that I was riding for the cavalry of my country: pride in being a winner, even. But when I looked on the horses and their records, my hopes went down. All other things being even, Ross would land Ireland's green silk an easy winner, with the emblazoned arms of the house of Crenneville a good second. I was willing to believe that if the rest of us were not "bunched" I could come in a fair third. The horses assigned us were as follows:

To Ireland—The brown colt Nathan Oaks.

To Austria—The chestnut colt Tom Aiken.

To the United States—The chestnut gelding Templar.

To England—The brown filly Rapidita.

To France—The bay filly Oleander.

I knew every one of them. Nathan Oaks was a glorious colt—capable of anything. I had watched him in his practice, and had seen him win two races, making time that old Templar with my weight couldn't touch, and the very day before our race came off he justified my faith in him, and sent my heart farther down in my boots by winning the two mile heat under the eyes of the people who were to watch his struggle for the "International" on the morrow.

The chestnut colt Tom Aiken was another flyer. He had a record, under 90 pounds, of making his mile on the Metairie in 1.43—about as fast as it could be done—and while he certainly could not repeat that performance under Crenneville, who was to scale 125 pounds when he came to the post, he ought, even with that weight to brush close on Nathan Oaks.

Rapidita and Oleander were both fleet and pretty racers, and under normal weights would have run right away from Templar; but we amateur jockeys could not be made to ride the weights of the professionals, who are mere skin, sinew, stunt and bone; and, all things considered, it was as fair an assignment as could be made with the means at hand.

But I had agreed to ride Templar at the request of old Mr. Harrison, who owned him, and the Natchez stable. He was more of a "hurdler" than anything else—had never won a flat race such as we were to ride, was a notorious bolter, and only a day or two before our race he pitched his powerful negro

jockey over his head and dragged him all over the field. I saw him.

But the stablemen and experts said Templar and I "get along together first rate." I had taken a fancy to him, and he was accorded to me.

Then came the announcement of the weights. That meant that with his saddle, and in full jockey dress, each rider must scale at mounting as follows:

King, 143; Rosenlecher, 135; Stuart, 133; Ross, 130, and de Crenneville. 128. To reach his weight the latter had to carry a three pound weight.

And thus were the long preliminaries settled.

As I warned your readers it is impossible to give this experience without its being decidedly personal, and, in reading over the preliminaries to "The International Race," it occurrs to me that had egotistical been used for personal it would have more accurately described the probable effect. It cannot be helped. Having been called on to furnish illustration of a theory advanced in an early paper of this series, I could think of none better than a West Pointer's experience with accomplished riders of other schools in the Metairie race meeting of 1872—and I happened to be the man.

We come now to the race itself. I had determined to win it if a possible thing, but had bet that I could not because there were two better horses than mine. When the race was first definitely arranged, and it was announced that I was to ride for the United States, no one, to my knowledge, said I would win, and a great many, as was told in last chapter, said I could not. However good as a cavalry rider a man might be, he had no chance on a race course against "these experts," was the verdict of a number of Northern acquaintances and army officers—none of whom, however, were young West Pointers. After the week or ten days, during which the practice riding of the five contestants had been closely watched, there seemed to be a change. And when "Doc" Underwood, the noted pool-seller, opened the ball the night of April 8, it was noted that Templar—my horse—sold first favorite, a thing he had never done before in a flat race—good a hurdler as he confessedly was.

Even to the minutest details of costume everything was in readiness three or four days ahead. The representatives of England, France and Austria had brought with them, of course, the beautiful silken jackets and caps, the immaculate breeches and natty boots in which they had ridden their races abroad. Ireland's gallant champion accepted the green silk of Hugh Gaffney, one of the most accomplished jockeys of the day. New Orleans boasted both tailor and bootmaker who were from "the old country," and knew just how things should be cut and made. I could not hope to rival the gorgeousness of the foreign colors, and so chose for mine the light blue and white of my old college —Columbia. At last came "ladies day," on which the International was to be run, and it was the loveliest of the meeting.

Here let me borrow somebody else's pen to tell of the scene and the race. Manton Marble of the New York World was interested spectator, and on the following day, April 10, the World gave this account:

[From our own correspondent.]

NEW ORLEANS, La., April 9.

Under the influences of improved weather and the additional interest manifested in the international race between amateur riders, the attendance at the Metairie track was fully as large today as on any previous day of the meetings. The increased attendance was more noticeable in the ladies' stand, many of whom were no doubt the personal friends of the contestants, who, to show their preferance, sported the colors of those they were most interested in, some even going so far as to lay innumerable wagers of kid gloves and other trifles on those whom they most admired. Ever since the race was first agitated it has created considerable interest in the clubs as to the abilities of those who had entered as the champions of their respective nationalities. France was represented by a young Parisian named George Rosenlechet, a member of the French Jockey Club, who was the first to suggest the race. As soon as it was agitated a young Austrian count expressed his willingness to appear and represent his country. For England, a young and popular member of society well known on Carondelet street, named Edward Stewart, was the next entry. For the United States, Lieutenant Charles King of General Emory's staff entered, and for a few days it was thought the list was complete, when Ireland found a champion in James Ross. The matter was laid before the Metairie Jockey Club, who, with their accustomed liberality, at once appointed a committee to take charge of the whole matter. An elegant prize in the shape of a gold-mounted whip was purchased of Griswold. The stakeowners were also consulted, and several excellent horses were placed at the service of the five gentlemen contestants.

THE ENTRIES.

The horses selected and the colors worn by their riders were as follows:

Count V. de Crennevill (Austria) on the chestnut colt Tom Aiken; jacket white, red sleeves, red cap.

M. George Rosenlecher (France) on the bay filly Oleander; jacket blue with gold stripes, blue cap.

Lieutenant Charles King (United States) on the chestnut gelding Templar; jacket blue, white cap.

Edward Stuart (England) on the brown filly Rapidita; jacket cerise, blue sleeves, blue cap.

James Ross (Ireland) on the brown colt Nathan Oaks; jacket green, white cap.

The race was second on the cards and Lieutenant King on Templar was the favorite against the field at large odds. As the distance was a mile and 80 yards, the start was effected a trifle above the upper end of the stand, which gave its occupants a good chance to see the respective styles of riding exhibited by each of the contestants. As they swept past the stand they were received with loud applause, which was again renewed when Lieutenant King was seen to have a clear lead on the old chestnut gelding Templar. Going up the back stretch all took a pull on their respective horses, and as they swung into the home stretch the race really became an exciting one, especially when Ross sent Ireland's green jacket up almost alongside of King, who was riding in splendid style. As they passed the end of the stand Count de Crenneville touched Tom Aiken lightly with the spur, and the chestnut responded gamely; the distance was too short, however, Lieutenant King winning the race in fine style by a length and a half. James Ross being second—a short neck in front of the count; Edward Stuart, England's representative, was fourth; and the originator of the race, the representative of France, last. Time, 1.56.

On Lieutenant King returning to weigh, he was loudly applauded by nearly all present. There was, however, a shade of disappointment visible among some of the ladies, who had evidently gone it heavy on the count and Mr. Ross,

both of whom are deservedly popular with the jeunnesse doree of New Orleans society.

Barring inaccuracies as to preliminaries that is a good account of the affair, but before explaining how it was won despite my belief it could not be won, some points may interest your readers.

The ladies' stand was crowded that day as I had never seen it before, and the colors of Rosenlecher and De Crenneville especially, and Stuart and Ross largely, were to be seen everywhere. Just two young ladies had the courage to wear the white and light blue of the Yankee.

Lieutenant King may have been the favorite against the field where the World's representative stood among a knot of club men and turf patrons—but he was not everywhere. A brother aide-de-camp who had only once before seen him in saddle came out on the track just as we "amateurs" issued from the weighing room with our racing saddles, and went with us into the paddock where the impatient horses were being led about.

I believe I was the first to mount and move out on the track, when he looked up as he was hurrying back to his place on the grand stand. "Bet you $50 you can't win it," and he noded his head toward Nathan Oaks, Ross' beautiful mount, whom we had seen winning the two-mile dashes on the previous day, and as that was the horse I most feared the bet would have been badly placed could I have taken it.

All the same, having watched the men and the horses for a week previous, I believed there was a point in which West Point practice and training would give me the advantage. There the cadet had to learn, on any kind of a horse, to control and guide him—to make him obey the will of the rider.

Now in most races on American soil when the horses come to the post it is no uncommon sight to see trainers and hostlers hanging on to their heads, the jockey meantime sitting like a circus monkey with no volition in the matter. And I knew that in their desire to have a fair start and an effective one the stewards and trainers would all be there superintending, and I had heard that each of my four rivals was to be led to the starting point and let loose at tap of the drum. I had seen it tried time and again on the old Metairie and never without several false starts, in which one or more of the racers would tear away several hundred yards before he could be brought back, involving vast fretting, sweating and nervousness for the horse and fatigue and exasperation to the rider. There was a great deal of excitement at the starting point—crowds on both sides of the track—and I could see that the grand stand had risen en masse to watch the scene. Presently we were marshaled in line some 20 yards beyond the starter's flag—the 80-yard point. There stood Billy Connor, drum in hand, with the flagman back of him. He was shouting injunctions and orders to the different trainers and they in reply were striving to hold in check these eager and mettlesome racers. Crenneville, on Tom Aiken, had the right, and that enterprising colt was tugging and pulling and dragging the trainers all over the track. Ross, on Nathan Oaks, was enjoying a similar experience over at the left. Rapidita and Oleander were revolving about their trainers and pointing their tails to every quarter of the globe with astonishing rapidity. Templar and I had the centre, and though he was pawing and plunging and standing on his hind legs, he was held facing the front and held firm, but of all the five he had no stablesmen at his head.

Twice had his owner come forward and essayed to seize him, and twice had he been ordered away. "I'm riding this horse today, Mr. Harrison, and no man must touch him."

"But, my Gawd, suh! Can you hold him?" he answered with infinite concern on his wet face—then scurried back out of the way.

Twice, thrice, came the words "Let 'em go!" and the jockey instincts of each stableman would prompt him to send his horse away ahead of the others. There would be a wild scramble of hoofs. Some one colt or filly would flash across the line a dozen yards ahead. Clang! clang! clang would go Connor's bell, calling them back. There would be a vision of three or four brilliant jackets shooting far away down the track. Ten minutes impatient waiting—two. three—sometimes more horses coming cantering back—puffing and disgusted. Five—six similar false starts were made. Five. six times they were slowly and with difficulty gathered back. Four horses and four riders were getting "blown" but Templar and I had never once crossed the line.

Of course he had plunged, reared, tugged at the bit; launched out with his heels and tried everything he could think of to get away, but it was all useless. When at last the drum tapped and we five shot away in a bunch under the roar that arose from the crowded stands, I was never cooler in my life—nor more hopeful.

Thus far all had worked as I believed it would. Now I had a plan for the rest of it. Templar hadn't great speed but he was fresh, eager and all his powers were in reserve. As we began to round the first turn, Stuart was a trifle to my left front urging his sweating filly: his eyes blazing and his face wet from every pore. I could hear Oleander a little behind my right shoulder and knew I had them both beaten. As we swept around to the back stretch, they had fallen behind and I had a clean lead of a length. Then, directly across the field from the grand stand where it would make a most effective coup, I could hear the Austrian urging Tom Aiken. Presently up he came alongside, and I could feel Templar thrilling and beginning to tug, but I kept the same pressure on the rein, never allowing him an ounce, and he could not stride away in a useless race. Then, urging and spurring, De Crenneville passed us, and at the third turn was two good lengths ahead, but Ross—the man I dreaded—was still to my right quarter, and we could wait, Templar and I. Now we were shooting around the turn towards the three-quarter mile post. "Aiken" was beginning to flag, and we were overhauling him. Desperately the Austrian began to spur and, in his eagerness to save space, steered too close to the rail. Another instant and it caught his boot, hurled his left leg back before he could recover, and away went his penalty paid. Even could he keep his lead now he had lost the prize, but he had over-ridden his horse, and now, as we came into the stretch and full in sight of home, now for the first time I gave Templar one touch of the spur and an inch of rein. In 20 seconds the Austrian was behind us and the goal before, and aiming straight for the white post far down the track we slid under that string easy winners, despite whipping and spurring of all the others, and Templar was fresh as a daisy and wild to go round again.

Then the task was to stop him. He ran almost to the quarter post before we turned, and, overtaking Ross, trolled back with him to weigh.

"I did not know they taught jockey riding at West Point," said an Austrian

consulate officer to me that night.

"They do not" was the answer; "but with what they do teach, a man ought to be a fair all-round rider."

And that, practically, is what Theodore Roosevelt said 15 years after.

"Two soldiers."

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TWO SOLDIERS.

BY

CHARLES KING,

U. S. ARMY,

AUTHOR OF "DUNRAVEN RANCH," "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "FROM THE RANKS," "THE DESERTER," ETC.

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TWO SOLDIERS.

I.

THE rain was plashing dismally on the grimy window-sill and over the awning of the shops below. The street-cars went jingling by with a dripping load of outside passengers on both platforms. Wagons and drays, cabs and closed carriages, that rattled or rumbled along the ordinarily busy thoroughfare, looked as though they had been dipped in the river before being turned loose on the street, and their Jehus, a bedraggled lot, must needs have had something amphibious in their composition, else they could not have borne up against the deluge that had been soaking the city for two days past. The policeman, waddling aimlessly about at the opposite corner, enveloped in rubber cap and overcoat, cast occasional wistful glances into the bar-room across the way, wherein the gas was burning in deference to the general gloom that overhung the neighborhood, and such pedestrians as had to be abroad hurried along under their umbrellas as though they half expected to have to swim before they could reach their destination. The dense cloud of sooty smoke that had overhung the metropolis for weeks past, and that wind from any direction could never entirely dissipate, for the simple reason that smoke-stacks by the score shot up in the outskirts on every side, now seemed to be hurled upon the roofs and walls, the windows and the pavement, in a black, pasty, carboniferous deposit, and every object out of doors that one could touch would leave its inky response upon the hand. A more depressing "spell of weather" had not been known for a year, and every living being in sight seemed saturated with the general gloom,—every living being except one: Captain Fred Lane, of the Eleventh Cavalry, was sitting at the dingy window of his office in the recruiting rendezvous on Sycamore Street and actually whistling softly to himself in supreme contentment.

Two missives had reached him that ghastly morning that had served to make him impervious to wind or weather. One—large, formal, impressive, and bearing the stamp of the War Department in heavy type across its upper corner—had borne to him the notification of his promotion to the rank of Captain (Troop D) Eleventh Cavalry, *vice* Curran, retired. The other—a tiny billet—had given him even greater happiness. It might be hard to say how many times he had read and re-read it since he found it on the snowy cloth of his particular breakfast-table in his particular corner of the snug refectory of "The Queen City," on the books of which most respectable if somewhat venerable club his name had been borne among the list of Army or Navy Members ever since his "graduation-leave," fifteen years before.

All his boyhood, up to the time of his winning his cadetship at West Point, had been spent in the city where for the past sixteen months he had considered himself fortunate in being stationed on recruiting-service. During the second year of his term at the Academy he was startled by the receipt of a sad letter from his mother, telling him briefly that his father, long one of the best-known among the business-men of the city, had been compelled to make an assignment. What was worse, he had utterly broken down under the strain, and would probably never be himself again. Proud, sensitive, and honorable, Mr. Lane had insisted on paying to the uttermost farthing of his means. Even the old homestead went, and the broken-hearted man retired with his faithful wife to a humble roof in the suburbs. There, a few months afterwards, he breathed his last, and there, during Fred's graduating year, she followed him. When the boy entered on his career in the army he was practically alone in the world. Out of the wreck of his father's fortune there came to him a little sum that started him in the service free from debt and that served as a nest-egg to attract future accumulations. This he had promptly banked until some good and safe investment should present itself, and, once with his regiment on the frontier, Mr. Lane had found his pay ample for all his needs.

It is unnecessary to recount the history of his fifteen years' service as a subaltern. Suffice it to say that, steering clear of most of the temptations to which young officers were subjected, he had won a reputation as a capital "duty-officer," that was accented here and there by some brilliant and dashing exploits in the numerous Indian campaigns through which the Eleventh had passed with no small credit. Lane was never one of the jovial souls of the regiment. His mood was rather taciturn and contemplative. He read a good deal, and spent many days in the saddle exploring the country in the neighborhood of his post and in hunting and fishing.

But, from the colonel down, there was not a man in the Eleventh who did not thoroughly respect and like him. Among the ladies, however, there were one or two who never lost an opportunity of giving the lieutenant a feline and not ineffective clawing when his name came up for discussion in the feminine conclaves occasionally held in the regiment. Sometimes, too, when opportunity served, he was made the victim of some sharp or sarcastic speech that was not always easy to bear in silence. Mrs. Judson, wife of the captain of B Troop, was reputed to

be "down on Lane," and the men had no difficulty whatever in locating the time when her change of heart took place.

The truth of the matter was that, thanks to simple habits and to his sense of economy, Lane had quite a snug little balance in the bank, and the ladies of the regiment believed it to be bigger than it really was; and, having approved the furnishing and fitting up of his quarters, the next thing, of course, that they essayed to do was to provide him with a wife. There the trouble began. Simultaneously with the arrival of his first bar as a first lieutenant there came from the distant East Mrs. Judson's younger sister "Emmy" and Mrs. Loring's pretty niece Pansy Fletcher. Lane was prompt to call on both, to take the young ladies driving or riding, to be attentive and courteous in every way; but, while he did thus "perceive a divided duty," what was Mrs. Loring's horror on discovering that pretty Pansy had fallen rapturously in love with "Jerry" Lattimore, as handsome, reckless, and impecunious a young dragoon as ever lived, and nothing but prompt measures prevented their marriage! Miss Fletcher was suddenly re-transported to the East, whither Jerry was too hard up to follow; and then, in bitterness of heart, Mrs. Loring blamed poor Fred for the whole transaction. "Why had he held aloof and allowed that—that scamp—that ne'er-do-weel—to cut in and win that innocent child's heart, as he certainly did do?" Against Lattimore the vials of her wrath were emptied *coram publico*, but against Lane she could not talk so openly.

Mrs. Judson had beheld the sudden departure of Miss Pansy with an equanimity she could barely disguise. Indeed, there were not lacking good Christians in the garrison who pointed significantly to the fact that she had almost too hospitably opened her doors to Miss Fletcher and her lover during that brief but volcanic romance. Certain it is, however, that it was in her house and in a certain little nook off the sitting-room that their long, delicious meetings occurred almost daily, the lady of the house being busy about the dining-room, the kitchen, or the chambers overhead, and Emmy, who was a good girl, but densely uninteresting, strumming on the piano or yawning over a book at the front window.

"What Mr. Lane needs is a gentle, modest, domestic little woman who will make his home a restful, peaceful refuge always," said Mrs. Judson; and, inferentially, Emmy was the gentle and modest creature who was destined so to bless him. The invitations to tea, the lures by which he was induced to become Emmy's escort to all the hops and dances, redoubled themselves after Miss Fletcher's departure; but it was all in vain. Without feeling any particular affinity for Mr. Lane, Emmy stood ready to say "Yes" whensoever he should ask; but weeks went on, he never seemed to draw nearer the subject, and just as Mrs. Judson had determined to resort to heroic measures and point out that his attentions to Emmy had excited the remark of the entire garrison, and that the poor child herself was looking wan and strange, there was a stage-robbery not twenty miles from the post. Lane, with fifteen troopers, was sent in pursuit of the desperadoes, and captured them, after a sharp fight, ninety miles up the

river and near the little infantry cantonment at the Indian reservation; and thither the lieutenant was carried with a bullet through his thigh. By the time he was well enough to ride, the regiment was again in the field on Indian campaign, and for six months he never saw Fort Curtis again. When he did, Emmy had gone home, and Mrs. Judson's politeness was something awful.

Lane was out with the Eleventh again in three more sharp and severe campaigns, received an ugly bullet-wound through the left shoulder in the memorable chase after Chief Joseph, was quartermaster of his regiment a year after that episode, then adjutant, and finally was given the recruiting-detail as he neared the top of the list of first lieutenants, and, for the first time in fifteen years, found himself once more among the friends of his youth,—and still a bachelor.

Securing pleasant quarters in the adjoining street, Mr. Lane speedily made himself known at the club to which he had been paying his moderate annual dues without having seen anything of it but its bills for years past, yet never knowing just when he might want to drop in. Then he proceeded, after office hours, to hunt up old chums, and in the course of the first week after his arrival he had found almost all of them. Bailey, who sat next him in school, was now a prominent and prosperous lawyer. Terry, who sat just behind him and occasionally inserted crooked pins in a convenient crack in his chair, was thriving in the iron business. Warden had made a fortune "on 'Change," and was one of the leading brokers and commission-merchants of the metropolis. He had always liked Warden: they lived close together, and used to walk to and from school with each other almost every day. Mr. Lane had started on his quest with a feeling akin to enthusiasm. Calm and reticent and retiring as he generally was, he felt a glow of delight at the prospect of once more meeting "the old crowd;" but that evening he returned to his rooms with a distinct sense of disappointment. Bailey had jumped up and shaken hands with much effusion of manner, and had "my-dear-fellow"-ed him for a minute or two, and then, "Now, where are you stopping? I'll be round to look you up the very first evening I can get away, and —of course we'll have you at the house;" but Lane clearly saw he was eager to get back to his desk, and so took his leave. Terry did not know him at all until he began to laugh, and then he blandly inquired what he'd been doing with himself all these years. But the man who rasped him from top to toe was Warden. Business hours were over, and their meeting occurred at the club. Two minutes after they had shaken hands, Warden was standing with his back to the log fire, his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, tilting on his toes, his head well back, and most affably and distinctly patronizing him.

"Well, Fred, you're still in the army, are you?" he asked.

"Still in the army, Warden."

"Well, what on earth do you find to do with yourself out there? How do you manage to kill time?"

"Time never hung heavily on my hands. It often happened that there wasn't half enough for all we had to do."

"You don't tell me! Why, I supposed that about all you did was to drink and play poker."

"Not an unusual idea, I find, Warden, but a very unjust one."

"Oh, yes, I know, of course, you have some Indian-fighting to do once in a while; but that probably amounts to very little. I mean when you're in permanent camp or garrison. I should think a man of your temperament would just stagnate in such a life. I wonder you hadn't resigned years ago and come here and made a name for yourself."

"The life has been rather more brisk than you imagine," he answered, with a quiet smile, "and I have grown very fond of my profession. But you speak of making a name for myself. Now, in what would that have consisted?"

"Oh, well, of course, if you really like the army and living in a desert and that sort of thing, I've nothing to say," said Warden; "but it always struck me as such a—such a—well, Fred, such a wasted life, all very well for fellows who hadn't brains or energy enough to achieve success in the real battle of life" (and here Warden was "swelling visibly"), "but not at all the thing for a man of your ability. We all conceded at school that you were head and shoulders above the rest of us. We were talking of it some years ago here in this very room: there'd been something about you in the papers,—some general or other had mentioned you in a report. Let's see: didn't you get wounded, or something, chasing some Indians?" Lane replied that he believed that "something like that had happened," but begged his friend to go on; and Warden proceeded to further expound his views:

"Now, you might have resigned years ago, taken hold of your father's old business, and made a fortune. There's been a perfect boom in railroad iron and every other kind of iron since that panic of '73. Look at Terry: he is rolling in money,—one of our most substantial men; and you know he was a mere drone at school. Why, Fred, if your father could have held on six months longer he'd have been the richest man in town to-day. It always seemed to me that he made such a mistake in not getting his friends to help him tide things over."

"You probably are not aware," was the reply, "that he went to friend after friend,—so called,—and that it was their failure or refusal to help that broke him down. The most active man in pushing him to the wall, I am told, was Terry's father, who had formerly been his chief clerk."

"Well," answered Warden, in some little confusion, for this and other matters in connection with the failure of Samuel Lane & Co., years before, were now suddenly recalled to mind, "that's probably true. Business is business, you know, and those were tough times in the money market. Still, you could have come back here when you left West Point, and built up that concern again, and been a big man to-day,—had your own establishment here, married some rich girl—you're not married, are you?"

Lane shook his head.

"On the other hand, then, you've been fooling away all this time in the army, and what have you got to show for it?"

"Nothing—to speak of," was the half-whimsical, half-serious answer.

"Well, there! Now don't you see? That's just what I'm driving at. You've thrown away your opportunities.—All right, Strong: I'll be with you in a minute," he called to a man who was signalling to him from the stairway. "Come in and see us, Fred. Come and dine with us,—any day. We're always ready for friends who drop in. I want you to meet Mrs. Warden and see my house. Now excuse me, will you? I have to take a hand at whist." And so away went Warden, leaving Lane to walk homeward and think over the experiences of the day.

He had "made a name for himself" that was well known from the Yellowstone to the Colorado. Thrice had that name been sent to the President with the recommendation of his department commander for brevets for conspicuous and gallant conduct in action against hostile Indians. The Pacific coast had made him welcome. Busy San Francisco had found time to read the *Alta's* and the *Chronicle's* correspondence from the scene of hostilities, and cordially shook hands with the young officer who had been so prominent in more than one campaign. Santa Fé and San Antonio, Denver, Cheyenne, and Miles City, were points where he could not go without meeting "troops of friends." It was only when he got back to his old home in the East that the lieutenant found his name associated only with his father's failure, and that his years of honorable service conveyed no interest to the friends of his youth. "Money makes the mare go," said Mr. Warden, in a subsequent conversation; and money, it seems, was what he meant in telling Lane he should have come home and "made a name for himself."

Lane had been on duty a year in the city when a rumor began to circulate, to the effect that investments of his in mining stocks had brought him large returns, and men at the club and matronly women at the few parties he attended began asking significant questions which now it pleased him to parry rather than answer directly. His twelve months' experiences in society had developed in him a somewhat sardonic vein of humor and made him, if anything, more reticent than before. And then—then all of a sudden there came over the spirit of his dream a marked and wondrous change. He no longer declined invitations to balls, parties, or dinners when he knew that certain persons were to be present. Mabel Vincent had just returned from a year's tour abroad, and Lieutenant Fred Lane had fallen in love at first sight.

It was a note from her that made even that dingy old office, on this most dismal of days, fairly glow and shine with a radiance of hope, with a halo of joy and gladness such as his lonely life had never known before. The very first time he ever saw himself addressed as Captain Fred Lane, Eleventh Cavalry, was in her dainty hand. He turned his chair to the window to read once again the precious words; but there entered, dripping, a Western Union messenger with a telegram.

Tearing it open, Lane read these words: "All join in congratulations on your promotion and in wonderment at the colonel's selection of your successor. Noel is named."

Lane gave a long whistle of amazement. "Of all men in the regiment!" he exclaimed. "Who would have thought of Gordon Noel?"

II.

The colonel of the Eleventh Cavalry was a gentleman who had some peculiarities of temperament and disposition. This fact is not cited as a thing at all unusual, for the unbiassed testimony of the subalterns and even the troop commanders of every cavalry regiment in service would go far towards establishing the fact that all colonels of cavalry are similarly afflicted. One of the salient peculiarities of the commanding officer of the Eleventh was a conviction that nothing went smoothly in the regiment unless the captains were all on duty with their companies; for, while at any time Colonel Riggs would approve an application for a lieutenant's leave of absence, it was worse than pulling teeth to get him to do likewise for a gentleman with the double bars on his shoulder. "Confound the man!" growled Captain Greene, "here I've been seven years with my troop, saving up for a six months' leave, and the old rip disapproves it! What on earth can a fellow say?"

"You didn't go about it right, Greeney," was the calm rejoinder of a comrade who had been similarly "cut" the year previous. "You should have laid siege to him through Madame a month or so. What she says as to who goes on leave and who doesn't is law at head-quarters, and I know it. Now, you watch Noel. That fellow is wiser in his generation than all the rest of us put together. It isn't six months since he got back from his staff detail, and you see how constant he is in his attentions to the old lady. Now, I'll bet you anything you like the next plum that tumbles into the regiment will go to his maw and nobody else's."

"Riggs wouldn't have the face to give anything to Noel,—in the way of detached duty, I mean. I heard him say when 'Gordy' was coming back to the regiment that he wished he had the power to transfer subs from troop to troop: he'd put Noel with the most exacting captain he knew and see if he couldn't get a little square service out of the fellow."

"That's all right, Greene. That's what he said six months ago, before Noel was really back, and before he had begun doing the devoted to her ladyship at head-quarters. Riggs wouldn't say so now, —much less do it. She wouldn't let him, comrade mine; and you know it."

"Noel has been doing first-rate since he got back, Jim," said Captain Greene, after a pause.

"Oh, Noel's no bad soldier in garrison,—at drill or parade. It's field-work and scouting that knocks him endwise; and if there's an Indian within a hundred miles—— Well, you know as much as I do on that subject."

Greene somewhat gloomily nodded assent, and his companion, being wound up for the day, plunged ahead with his remarks:

"Now, I'm just putting this and that together, Greene, and I'll make you a bet. Riggs has managed things ever since he has been colonel so that a lieutenant is ordered detached for recruiting-service and never a captain. It won't be long before Lane gets his promotion;

and I'll bet you that even before he gets it Riggs will have his letter skimming to Washington begging his immediate recall and nominating a sub to take his place. I'll give you odds on that; and I'll bet you even that the sub he names will be Gordy Noel."

But, though he scouted the idea, Greene would not bet, for at that instant the club-room was invaded by a rush of young officers just returning from target-practice, and the jolliest laugh, the most all-pervading voice, the cheeriest personality, of the lot were those of the gentleman whose name Captain Jim Rawlins had just spoken.

"What you going to have, fellows?" he called. "Here, Billy, old man, put up that spelter: I steered the gang in here, and it's my treat. *Don't* go, Forbes; come back, old fellow, and join us. Captain, what shall it be? Say, you all know Dick Cassidy of the Seventh? I heard such a good rig on him this morning. I got a letter from Tommy Craig, who's on duty at the War Department, and he told me that Dick was there trying to get one of these blasted college details. What d'ye suppose a cavalryman wants to leave his regiment for, to take a thing like that?"

"Perhaps his health is impaired, Noel," said Wharton, with a humorous twinkle in his handsome eyes. "Even cavalrymen have been known to have to quit their beloved profession on that account and get something soft in the East for a year or so."

The color mounted to Noel's cheeks, but he gave no other sign of understanding the shaft as aimed at him. Promptly and loudly as ever he spoke out:

"Oh, of course, if he's used up in service and has to go in to recuperate, all well and good; but I always supposed Cassidy was a stalwart in point of health and constitution. Who's going to the doctor's to-night?—you, Jack?"

Jack—otherwise Lieutenant John Tracy—shook his head as he whiffed at the cigarette he had just lighted and then stretched forth his hand for the foaming glass of beer which the attendant brought him, but vouchsafed no verbal reply. Lee and Martin edged over to where the two captains were playing their inevitable game of seven-up. Two of the juniors,—young second lieutenants,—despite the extreme cordiality of Noel's invitation, begged to be excused, as they did not care to drink anything,—even a lemonade; and no sooner had the party finished their modest potation than there was a general move. Wallace and Hearn went in to the billiard-room; Wharton and Lee started in the direction of their quarters; and presently Mr. Noel was the only man in the club-room without an occupation of some kind or a comrade to talk to.

Now, why should this have been the case? Noel's whole manner was overflowing with jollity and kindliness; his eyes beamed and sparkled as he looked from one man to the other; he hailed each in turn by his Christian name and in tones of most cordial friendship; he chatted and laughed and had comical anecdotes to tell the party; he was a tall, stylish, fine-looking fellow, with expressive dark eyes and wavy dark-brown hair; his moustache was the secret envy of more than half his associates; his figure was really elegant in its grace

and suppleness; his uniforms fitted him like a glove, and were invariably of Hatfield's choicest handiwork. Appearances were with him in every sense of the word; and yet there was some reason why his society was politely but positively shunned by several of his brother officers and "cultivated" by none.

It was only a few years after the great war when Gordon Noel joined the Eleventh from civil life. He came of an old and influential family, and was welcomed in the regiment as an acquisition. He made friends rapidly, and was for two or three years as popular a youngster as there was in the service. Then the troop to which he was attached was ordered to the Plains, *via* Leavenworth. It was a long journey by boat, and by the time they reached the old frontier city orders and telegrams were awaiting them, one of which, apparently to Mr. Noel's great surprise, detached him from his company and directed him to report for temporary duty at the War Department in the city of Washington. He was there eighteen months, during which time his regiment had some sharp battles with the Cheyennes and Kiowas in Kansas and the Indian Territory. Then a new Secretary of War gave ear to the oft-repeated appeals of the colonel of the Eleventh to have Mr. Noel and one or two other detached gentlemen returned to duty with their respective companies, and just as they were moving to the Pacific coast the absentees reported for duty and went along. At Vancouver and Walla Walla Noel seemed to regain by his joviality and good-fellowship what he had lost in the year and a half of his absence, though there were out-and-out soldiers in the Eleventh who said that the man who would stay on "fancy duty" in Washington or anywhere else while his comrades were in the midst of a stirring campaign against hostile Indians couldn't be of the right sort.

Up in Oregon the Modoc troubles soon began, and several troops were sent southward from their stations, scouting. There were several little skirmishes between the various detachments and the agile Indians, with no great loss on either side; but when "Captain Jack" retired to the natural fastness of the lava-beds, serious work began, and here Mr. Noel was found to be too ill to take part in the campaign, and was sent in to San Francisco to recuperate. The short but bloody war was brought to a close without his having taken part in any of its actions, but he rejoined after a delightful convalescence in San Francisco (where it was understood that he had broken down only after riding night and day and all alone some three hundred miles through the wilderness with orders to a battalion of his regiment that was urgently needed at the front), and was able to talk very glibly of what had occurred down in the Klamath Lake country. Then came his promotion to a first-lieutenancy, and, as luck would have it, to a troop stationed at the Presidio. For three months he was the gayest of the gay, the life of parties of every kind both in town and in garrison; he was in exuberant health and spirits; he danced night after night, and was the most popular partner ever welcomed in the parlors of hospitable San Francisco. And then all of a sudden there came tidings of an outbreak among the Arizona Apaches of so formidable a character that the division commander decided to send his Presidio troopers to

reinforce the one regiment that was trying to cover a whole Territory. There was pathetic parting, with no end of lamentation, when Mr. Noel was spirited away with his lynx-eyed captain; but they need not have worried,—those fair dames and damsels; not a hair of his handsome head was in danger, for the —th had grappled with and throttled their foes before the detachment from the Eleventh were fairly in the Territory, and the latter were soon ordered to return and to bring with them, as prisoners to be confined at Alcatraz, the leaders of the outbreak, who would be turned over to them by the —th. To hear Noel tell of these fierce captives afterwards was somewhat confusing, as, from his account, it would appear that they had been taken in hand-to-hand conflict by himself and a small detachment of his own troop; but these were stories told only to over-credulous friends.

The Eleventh came eastward across the Rockies in time to participate in the great campaign against the Sioux in '76, and was on the Yellowstone when Custer and his favorite companies were being wiped out of existence on the Little Horn. The news of that tragedy made many a heart sick, and Mr. Noel was so much affected that when his comrades started to make a night ride to the front to join what was left of the Seventh, he was left behind, ostensibly to sleep off a violent headache. He promised to ride after and catch them the next day, but, through some error, got aboard General Terry's steamer, the Far West, and made himself so useful looking after the wounded that the surgeon in charge was grateful, and, knowing nothing of his antecedents, gave him a certificate on which he based an application for leave on account of sickness, and went to Bismarck with the wounded, and thence to the distant East, where he thrilled clubs and dinner-tables with graphic accounts of the Custer battle and of how we got up just in time to save the remnant of the Seventh. The Eleventh fought all through the campaign of '76 and the chase after Chief Joseph in '77; but Noel was again on temporary duty at the War Department, and there he stayed until '78, by which time various officials had become acquainted with some of the facts in the case. The Eleventh "cold-shouldered" him for a while after he got back; but they happened to be now in a region where there were no "hostiles," and where hops, germans, theatricals, tableaux, and entertainments of all kinds were the rage. No other man could be half so useful to the ladies as Gordon Noel. He had just come from Washington, and knew *everything;* and when *they* took him up and made much of him 'twas no use for the men to stand aloof; they had to take him up too. Lane was adjutant of the regiment at this time; and he, having seen every report and letter with reference to Mr. Noel that had been filed in the office, would hardly speak to him at all except when on duty, and this feeling was intensified when, a year or so later, they were suddenly hurried to Arizona on account of a wild dash of the Chiricahuas, and as the different companies took the field and hastened in the pursuit Mr. Noel was afflicted with a rheumatic fever of such alarming character that the youthful "contract" surgeon who had accompanied his troop held him back at the railway and speedily sent him East on a three months' sick-leave, which family influence soon made six. And this was about the record and reputation that

Mr. Noel had succeeded in making when Captain Rawlins was ready to bet Captain Greene that, despite it all, the regimental Adonis would get the recruiting-detail, *vice* Lane, for everybody knew Fred Lane so well as to prophesy that he would apply to be relieved and ordered to rejoin his regiment, and everybody was eager to see him take hold of poor old Curran's troop, for if anybody could "straighten it out" Lane could.

The news that Noel was named by the colonel caused a sensation at regimental head-quarters which the Eleventh will probably not soon forget. "Old Riggs" had become the commander of the regiment after it seemed that the Indian wars were over and done with, and, thanks to our peculiar system of promotion, was now at the head of an organization with which he had never served as subaltern, captain, or junior field-officer. Discipline forbade saying anything to his face,—for which the colonel was devoutly thankful,—but everybody said to everybody else that it was all Mrs. Riggs's doing, a fact which the colonel very well knew.

So did Noel, though he rushed into the club-room apparently overwhelmed with amazement and delight:

"I supposed of *course* it would be Follansbee. I never dreamed he would give it to me. Come up, crowd! come up everybody! It's champagne to-day," he jovially shouted; and there were men who could not bear to snub him openly. Nothing had really ever been proved against him: why should they judge him? But there were several who declined, alleging one excuse or another, and even those who drank with him did so while applauding Wharton's toast:

"Well, Noel, here's to you! It ought to have been Follansbee; but I wish you the joy of it."

III.

Never before had Fred Lane known the sensation of being reluctant to rejoin his regiment. When the colonel wrote a personal letter to him some eight or ten weeks previous, telling him that Curran would almost surely get the next vacancy on the retired list and that he would expect his old adjutant to come back to them at once and restore efficiency and discipline to Troop D, Mr. Lane replied with the utmost readiness; but this was before Mabel Vincent came into his life and changed its whole current. How much and how devotedly he loved her, Lane himself never realized until the day his promotion reached him, and with it the news that his successor was already designated. He knew that within the week he might expect orders from the War Department to join his troop at Fort Graham as soon as he had turned over his funds and property to the officer designated to relieve him; he knew Noel so well as to feel assured that he would not wait for the arrival of formal orders, but, if the colonel would permit, would start the instant he received telegraphic notification from Washington that "Old Riggs's" nomination had been approved. "This is Wednesday," he mused; "and by a week from to-day I can count on his being here; and in ten days I must go."

There was a large party that night, and, fully a week before, he had asked that he might have the honor of being Miss Vincent's escort. It was with great disappointment that he received her answer, which was spoken, however, in a tone of such sorrow that poor Lane felt that the barbs, at least, of the arrow had been removed.

"I don't know how to tell you how I regret having to say 'No,' Mr. Lane," she said, and there was a tremor in her voice and a little quiver at the corners of her pretty mouth. "I have almost felt confident that you were going to ask me,—is that a very bold thing to say?—for you have been so—so kind to me since our first meeting, and indeed I wanted in some way to let you know that there were other arrangements already made. But how could I say anything? Mr. Rossiter, the eldest son of father's former partner, comes to pay us a visit of four or five days before he goes abroad again. And he is a great friend of the Chiltons, and, being our guest, he goes with me. Indeed, I'm *very* sorry, Mr. Lane, if you are disappointed."

Fred, of course, begged that she should give herself no uneasiness. There was no other girl whom he had thought of taking. Mr. Rossiter was very much to be envied, and he would like to call and pay his respects to that gentleman when he arrived. "By all means do," said Miss Vincent; and, if not asking too much, would Mr. Lane get him a card at the club? Brother Rex was away, or she wouldn't trouble him. But Lane was delighted to be troubled. Anything she asked—any service he could render her—he flew with untold eagerness to accomplish; and, though properly jealous of the coming man,—this Mr. Rossiter, of whom he had never before heard mention,—he was eager to meet and entertain him. The gentleman was to arrive on Monday, and Lane spent a delightful evening at the Vincents', wondering why he hadn't come. Tuesday would surely bring him, or an explanation, said Miss Mabel; and on Tuesday Lane was prompt to call, and glad to spend another long evening at the hospitable old homestead, and stoutly did he hold his ground through three successive relays of visitors, encouraged to do so by a certain look in his lady's bright eyes that spoke volumes to his throbbing heart, and that very next morning at the club he found her dainty missive on his breakfast-table. How early she must have risen to write it!—and to have seen the announcement of his promotion in the Washington despatches! True, he remembered that it was frequently her pleasure to be up betimes to give her father his coffee; for Vincent *père* was a business-man of the old school, who liked to begin early in the day. Of course he had seen the name in the Washington news and had read the paragraph to her: that was the way to account for it. But her note was a joy to him in its sweet, half-shy, half-confidential wording. She merely wrote to say that Mr. Rossiter had wired that he would be detained in New York until the end of the week; and now, if Captain Lane had *really* made no engagement, she would be glad indeed if he cared to renew the invitation which with such regret she was compelled a week ago to decline. Lane totally forgot his breakfast in his haste to rush to the writing-room and send her a reply.

All "The Queen City" had been quick to see or hear of his "sudden

smite" and consequent devotion to Mabel Vincent, and great was the speculation as to the probable result.

"How can she encourage him as she does? What can she see in that solemn prig?" indignantly demanded Miss Fanny Holton, who had shown a marked interest in Mr. Lane during his first six months in society and had danced with him all through the season. "He is one of the forlornest, stupidest men I ever knew,—utterly unlike what I supposed a cavalry officer to be."

"And yet, Fanny dear, you were very much taken up with him the first winter,—last year, I mean," was the reply of her most devoted and intimate friend.

"What an outrageous fib! I wasn't; and if I was, it was because I wanted to draw him out,—do *something* to enliven him. Of course I danced with him a great deal. There isn't a better dancer in town, and you know it, Maud: you've said so yourself time and again."

"Well, *you* didn't draw him out,—nor on. But the moment he sees Mabel Vincent he falls heels over head in love with her. Why, I never saw a man whose every look and word so utterly 'gave him away,'" was Miss Maud's characteristic and slangy reply. "And it's my belief she'll take him, too. She likes him well, and she says he knows more than any other man she has ever met.

"He has money, too, and can resign and live here if she wants him to," went on Miss Maud, after a pause which, oddly enough, her friend had not taken advantage of.

"You don't know anything about what Mabel Vincent will or won't do, Maud. I've known her years longer than you have, and, though I'm awfully fond of her, and wouldn't have this repeated for the world,—and you must swear never to repeat it to anybody,—I know her so well that I can say she doesn't know her own mind now and would change it in less than six months if she did. She is as fickle in love as in her friendships; and you can't have forgotten how inseparable you and she were for three months at Madame Hoffman's, and then how she fastened on Katherine Ward. I don't care a snap of my finger whom Mr. Lane chooses to fall in love with, but if it's Mabel Vincent he'd better insist on a short engagement and stand guard over her with his sword in the mean time. It's 'out of sight out of mind' with her, and has been ever since she was four years old."

And so in the smoking-room at the club and in the feminine cliques and coteries in society the probability of Mabel Vincent's accepting Lieutenant Lane was a matter of frequent discussion. But of all this chit-chat and speculation Captain Lane stood in profound ignorance as he entered his dark office that drenching Wednesday morning with her precious note in his waistcoat-pocket. He neither knew nor cared what old Vincent was worth: all he wanted was Mabel's own sweet self, for he loved her with his whole heart and soul, with all the strength and devotion of his deep and loyal nature. He could hardly control his voice so as to speak in the conventional official tone to the sergeant in charge as the latter saluted him at the door-way and made the customary report of the presence of the detachment. Lane stepped into his little dressing-room and quickly appeared in his

neat fatigue uniform. There wasn't a ghost of a chance of would-be recruits wandering in that day; but he was a stickler for discipline. He required his men to be always in their appropriate uniform, and never neglected wearing his own while in the office; yet in all the Queen City no one but his little party, the applicants for enlistment, and the few citizens who came in on business had ever seen him except in civilian dress.

"These reports and returns all go in to-morrow, I believe?" said Lane to his sergeant.

"They do, sir."

"Well, will you take them in to the clerk again," said Lane, blushing vividly, "and tell him to alter that 'First Lieutenant' to 'Captain' wherever it occurs? The—official notification is just here," he added, almost apologetically.

"Sure I'm glad to hear it, sir. All the men will be glad, sir; and I'm proud to think that I was the first man to salute the captain to-day," was the sergeant's delighted answer. "I'll call Taintor in at once."

But Lane was blissfully thinking of the little note, now transferred to the breast-pocket of his uniform blouse, and of how not his honest old sergeant but sweet Mabel Vincent was the first to hail him by his new title; and in thinking of the note and of her he failed to notice that, so far from coming at once, it was fully ten or fifteen minutes before Taintor, the clerk, put in an appearance, and when he did that his face was ashen-gray and his hand shook as though with palsy.

"The sergeant will tell you what is to be done with the papers, Taintor," said Lane, conscious that he was blushing again, and consequently striving to appear engrossed in the morning paper. The man picked them up one after another and without a word; he dropped one to the floor in his nervousness, but made a quick dive for it, and then for the door, as though fearful of detention. He hurried through the room in which the sergeant and one or two men were seated, and, reaching his big desk at a rear window, where he was out of sight, dropped the papers on the floor and buried his face in his shaking hands.

A few minutes later the sergeant, coming into the little cubby-hole of a room in which Taintor had preferred to do his work, found him with his arms on the desk and his face hidden in them, and the soldier clerk was quivering and twitching from head to foot.

"What's the matter with you, Taintor?" growled the old soldier. "Didn't you promise me you'd quit drinking?"

The face that looked up into his was ghastly.

"It isn't drink, sergeant," moaned the man. "At least, I haven't exceeded for a month. I've got a chill,—an ague of some kind. Just let me run down to the drug-store and get some quinine,—with perhaps a little brandy. Then I can do this work. *Do*, sergeant. I won't abuse your kindness."

"Well, go, then," was the reluctant answer; "but get back quick. And only one drink, mind you."

Taintor seized his cap and fairly tottered through the adjoining room to the stairway, down which he plunged madly, and, heedless of the pelting rain, darted across the street to the gas-lighted bar-room.

"By G—d," muttered the veteran sergeant, "there's something worse than either whiskey or ague back of this; and I could swear to it."

IV.

Captain Lane, as has been said, allowed until the following Wednesday for the arrival of his regimental comrade Mr. Noel. He was not a little surprised, however, on the following Tuesday morning, as he sat at breakfast at the club, glancing over the morning paper, to come upon the following announcement:

"DISTINGUISHED ARRIVAL.

"Our readers will be interested in knowing that Captain Gordon Noel, of the Eleventh U.S. Cavalry, has been ordered on duty in the city, in charge of the cavalry rendezvous on Sycamore Street. Captain Noel comes to us with a reputation that should win instant recognition and the heartiest welcome from the Queen City. For nearly fifteen years he has served with his gallant regiment, and has been prominent in every one of the stirring campaigns against the hostile Indians of our Western frontier. He has fought almost every savage tribe on the continent; was disabled in the Modoc campaign in '73, commanded the advance-guard of his regiment that reached the scene of the Custer massacre only just in time to rescue the remnant of the regiment from a similar fate, and for his services on that campaign was awarded the compliment of staff duty in the city of Washington. At his own request, however, he was relieved from this, and rejoined his regiment when hostilities were threatened in Arizona two years ago. And now, as a reward for gallant and distinguished conduct in the field, he is given the prized recruiting-detail. Captain Noel is the guest of his cousin, the Hon. Amos Withers, at his palatial home on the Heights; and our fair readers will be interested in knowing that he is a bachelor, and, despite his years of hardship, danger, and privation, is a remarkably fine-looking man.

"It is understood that Lieutenant Lane, the present recruiting officer, has been ordered to return to his regiment at once, although the time has not yet expired."

In the expression on Captain Lane's face as he finished this item there was something half vexed, half comical.

A few hours afterwards, while he was seated in his office, the orderly entered, and announced two gentlemen to see the captain. Lane turned to receive his visitors, but before he could advance across the dark room the taller of the two entering the door made a spring towards him, clapped him cordially on the back, and, with the utmost delight, shouted, "How are you, old fellow? How well you're looking! Why, I haven't set eyes on you since we were out on the field hunting up old Geronimo's trail! By Jove! but I'm glad to see you!" And Lane had no difficulty in recognizing at once his regimental comrade Gordon Noel.

"Let me present you to my cousin, Mr. Withers," said Noel.

And a stout, florid man, whom Lane had often seen at the club, but to whom he had never hitherto been made known, bowed with much cordiality and extended his hand.

"I didn't know," said he, "that you were a friend of Noel's, or I'd have come to see you before, and invited you to my house."

"Friend!" exclaimed Noel. "*Friend!* Why, we've been partners and chums! Why, we've been all over this continent together, Withers! Fred, do you remember the time we were up on the Sioux campaign?—the night I went over with those fellows to hunt up the trail to the Custer ground? Let's see, you were acting adjutant then, if I recollect right. Oh, yes; you were back with the colonel."

Lane received his guests with perfect courtesy, but without that overweening cordiality which distinguished the other's manner, and then Mr. Withers entered into the conversation. Turning to Captain Lane, he said,—

"I didn't know that you had been on the Sioux campaign. Were you there too?"

Lane replied quietly that he had been with his regiment through that year,—in fact, had never been away from it for any length of time, except on this detail which had brought him to his old home.

"Oh, yes; I remember having heard that this was your home. I am very sorry indeed that you did not make yourself known to me before," said Mr. Withers. "You know that I am a very busy man and don't get around much. Now you can come and dine with us this evening, can you not? Mrs. Withers will certainly expect you, now that Noel is here."

"I am very sorry indeed, Mr. Withers, but I am already engaged."

"You must make early bids if you want to get this young man, Amos," put in Mr. Noel, affectionately patting Lane on the shoulder. "It was just so in the regiment. He was always in demand.—Well, when *can* you come, Fred? What evening shall we say?"

"It will depend, perhaps, on the day I turn over the property to you. How soon do you wish to take hold?"

"Oh, any time. Any day. Whenever you're ready."

"I'm ready now, to-day, if you choose," was Lane's prompt response. "I fancied you might be here by to-morrow."

"Yes, you bet I didn't let the grass grow under my feet. The moment we got the telegraphic notification that the colonel's nomination was approved, I lit out for the railroad," said Noel, laughing gleefully.

"And when will you come in and take over the property? There's a good deal of clothing to be counted. As for the funds, they, of course, are all in the bank."

"Suit yourself about that, Freddy, old boy. I'm going down street with Amos now. How'll to-morrow morning do?"

"Very well indeed. You will find me here any time you come in."

"All right. Now get out of your yellow stripes and come along down town with us. The carriage is right here at the door. We're going over to see the works,—Mr. Withers's foundries, you know. Come."

"Yes, come with us. I think I have heard it was your father who—ah—who was in the same line of business at one time, Mr. Lane," said Mr. Withers.

"*Captain* Lane, Amos!—*Captain* Lane! Great Scott! you mustn't 'mister' a man who has been through the years of service he has."

"I beg pardon. I did not so understand you, Gordon, when we were talking last night with the—when we were having our smoke and chat after dinner.—You will come with us, won't you, captain?"

"I wish I could, Mr. Withers, but my office-hours have to be observed, and I cannot leave in the morning. Thank you heartily none the less.—Then you will be here to-morrow, Noel?"

"To-morrow be it, Fred: so *au revoir*, if you can't join us. I mustn't keep Withers waiting,—business-man, you know. God bless you, old fellow, you don't begin to realize how delighted I am to see you! So long."

"But about dining with us, Captain——"

"Oh, Lord, yes!" burst in Noel. "What evening, now? I'd almost forgotten. Getting in among bricks and mortar addles my head. 'Tisn't like being out in the saddle with the mountain breezes all around you: hey, Fred? Gad! I don't know whether I can stand this sort of thing, after our years of campaigning." And the lieutenant looked dubiously around upon the dark and dingy walls and windows.

"Suppose we say Thursday evening, captain," suggested Mr. Withers; "and I'll have just a few friends to meet you two army gentlemen."

"I shall be very happy, Mr. Withers."

"Good! That's the talk, Fred!" heartily shouted the lieutenant, bringing his hand down with a resounding whack between Lane's shoulder-blades. "Now we *are* off! Come along, Amos." And the cousins disappeared down the dark stairway and popped into the carriage.

"Not a very demonstrative man, your friend the captain, but seems to be solid," was Mr. Withers's remark.

"Oh, yes. He is about as solid as they make them," answered Noel, airily. "Lane has his faults, like most men. It is only those who really know him, who have been associated with him for years, and whom he trusts and likes, that are his friends. Now, *I'd* go through fire and water for him, and he would for me,—but of course you wouldn't think it, to see his perfectly conventional society manner this morning. If I had left you down at the foot of the stairs and had stolen up on tiptoe and gone over and put my arms round his neck, you would probably have found us hugging each other and dancing about that room like a couple of grizzly bears when you came up, and the moment he caught sight of you he would have blushed crimson and got behind his ice screen in a second. You just ought to have seen him the night we met each other with our detachments down near Guadalupe Cañon when we were hunting Geronimo. Some d—d fool of a ranchman had met him and said I was killed in the little affair we had with the Apache rear-guard. Why, I was perfectly amazed at the emotion

he showed. Ever since then I've sworn by Fred Lane; though, of course, he has traits that I wish he could get rid of."

"Good officer, isn't he?"

"Ye—es, Lane isn't half a bad soldier. Of course it remains to be seen what sort of captain he will make. He has only just got his troop."

"But I mean he—well—is a brave man,—has shown up well in these Indian fights you were telling us about?"

"H'm!" answered Noel, with a quiet little chuckle: "if he wasn't, you bet he wouldn't have been all these years in the Eleventh. A shirk of any kind is just the one thing we *won't* stand. Why, Amos, when old Jim Blazer was our colonel during those years of the Sioux and Cheyenne and Nez Percé wars he ran two men out of the regiment simply because they managed to get out of field duty two successive years. Oh, no! Lane's all right as a soldier, or he wouldn't be wearing the crossed sabres of the Eleventh."

Mr. Withers listened to these tales of the doings and sayings of the regiment with great interest. "Lane might have been here a dozen years," said he to himself, "and no one in our community would have known anything at all about the dangers and hardships his comrades and he had encountered in their frontier service. It's only when some fellow like Noel comes to us that we learn anything whatever of our army and its doings."

He took his cousin to the great moulding-works of which he was the sole head and proprietor, and presented his foremen and his clerks to the captain, and told them of his career in the Indian wars on the frontier, and then up on 'Change and proudly introduced "my cousin Captain Noel" to the magnates of the Queen City; and, though not one out of a dozen was in the least degree interested in "the captain" or cared a grain of wheat what the army had done or was doing on the frontier, almost every man had time to stop and shake hands cordially with the handsome officer, for Amos Withers was said to be a man whose check for a round million would be paid at sight, and anybody who was first-cousin to that amount of "spot cash" was worth stopping to chat with, even in the midst of the liveliest tussle 'twixt bull and bear on the floor of the Chamber of Commerce. A tall, gray-haired gentleman, with a slight stoop to his shoulders and rather tired, anxious eyes, who listened nervously to the shouts from "the pit" and scanned eagerly the little telegraphic slips thrust into his hand by scurrying messenger-boys, was introduced as Mr. Vincent, and Mr. Vincent inquired if Noel knew Lieutenant—or rather Captain—Lane.

"Know Fred Lane? He is the best friend I have in the world," was the enthusiastic answer, "and one of the best men that ever lived."

"Ah! I'm glad to know you,—glad to know what you say. The captain is a constant visitor at our house, a great friend of ours, in fact. Ah! excuse me a moment." And Mr. Vincent seized a certain well-known broker by the arm and murmured some eager inquiries in his ear, to which the other listened with ill-disguised impatience.

Withers and, of course, "the captain" were the centre of a cordial —not to say obsequious—group so long as they remained upon the floor, and the secretary presently came to them with the compliments

of the president and a card admitting Captain Gordon Noel to the floor of the Chamber at any time during business hours, which that officer most gracefully acknowledged and then went on replying to the questions of his new friends about the strange regions through which he had scouted and fought, and the characteristics of the Indian tribes with whom he had been brought in contact. And by the time Cousin Amos declared they must go up to the club for luncheon, everybody was much impressed by the hearty, jovial manner of the dashing cavalryman, and there were repeated hand-shakes, promises to call, and prophecies of a delightful sojourn in their midst as he took his leave.

"Has Captain Lane come in yet to lunch?" inquired Mr. Withers of the liveried attendant at "The Queen City," as his cousin inscribed his name and regiment in the visitors' book, as introduced by "A. W.," in ponderous strokes of the pen.

"No, sir. It's considerably past the time the gentleman generally comes. I don't think he'll be in to-day, sir."

"Then we won't wait, Gordon. We'll order for two. What wine do you like?"

* * * * * * * * *

Over at the dingy recruiting-office Captain Lane had forgotten about luncheon. There were evidences of carelessness on the part of the clerk who had made out his great batch of papers, and the further he looked the more he found. The orderly had been sent for Taintor, and had returned with the information that he was not at his desk. Sergeant Burns, when called upon to explain how it happened that he allowed him to slip away, promptly replied that it was half-past eleven when he came out of the captain's office and said that the captain would want him all the afternoon, so he had best go and get his dinner now. Half-past twelve came, and he did not return. The sergeant went after him, and came back in fifteen minutes with a worried look about his face to say that Taintor had not been to dinner at all, and that the door of the little room he occupied was locked. He had not been in the house since eight that morning.

"I'm afraid, sir, he's drinkin' again," said Burns; "but he's so sly about it I never can tell until he is far gone."

"You go out yourself, and send two of the men, and make inquiries at all his customary haunts," ordered Lane. "I will stay here and go through all these papers. None are right, so far. He never failed me before; and I do not understand it at all."

But when night came Taintor was still missing,—had not been seen nor heard of,—and Captain Lane had written a hurried note to the lady of his love to say that a strange and most untoward case of desertion had just occurred which necessitated his spending some time with the Chief of Police at once. He begged her to make his excuses to her good mother for his inability to come to dinner. Later in the evening he hoped to see her.

"P.S.—Gordon Noel, who is to relieve me, has arrived. I have only three or four days more."

"Gordon Noel!" said Miss Vincent, pensively. "Where have I heard of Gordon Noel?"

V.

And now a matter has to be recorded which will go far to convince many of our readers that Captain Lane was even more of an old-fashioned prig than he has hitherto appeared to be. After leaving the Vincents' late on the previous day, he had come to his rooms, and sat there for fully two hours in the endeavor to compose a brief, manly letter addressed to Vincent *père*. It was nothing more nor less than the old style of addressing a gentleman of family and requesting permission to pay his addresses to his daughter Mabel. A very difficult task was the composition of this letter for our frontier soldier. He was desperately in earnest, however; time was short, and after several attempts the missive was completed. His first duty in the morning was to send that letter by an orderly to Mr. Vincent's office. Then he turned to his sergeant and asked for news of the deserter. Not a word had been heard,—not a single word.

"I have been everywhere I could think of, sir," said the sergeant, "and both the men have been around his customary haunts last night and this morning making inquiries, but all to no purpose. The detectives came and burst into his trunk, and there was nothing in it worth having. He had been taking away his clothing, etc., from time to time in small packages and secreting them we don't where. One thing I heard, sir, that I never knew before, and that was that after he had gone to bed at night he would frequently steal out of his room and go away and never reappear until breakfast-time in the morning. And now will the lieutenant—the captain pardon me for asking the question, Are the check-books all right, sir?"

"What put that idea into your head?" asked Lane.

"Well, sir, some of the men tell me that he was always writing at his desk, and once Strauss said that he had picked up a scrap of paper that he hadn't completely destroyed, and the handwriting on it didn't look like Taintor's at all; he said it more resembled that of the captain; and it made me suspicious. I never heard this until late last night."

A sudden thought occurred to Lane. Taking out his check-book, he carefully counted the checks remaining and compared them with the number of stubs, and found, to his surprise and much to his dismay, that at least five or six checks were missing.

"Send for a cab at once. I must go down to the bank. You stay here, and when Lieutenant Noel comes, give him my compliments, and ask him to sit down and wait awhile and read the morning paper. I'll be back in a very short time."

Following the custom established by his predecessor, Captain Lane had always kept the recruiting-funds in the First National Bank. His own private funds he preferred to keep in an entirely different establishment,—the Merchants' Exchange.

The cab whirled him rapidly to the building indicated, and, although it lacked half an hour of the time of opening, he made his way into the office and asked to see the paying teller.

"Will you kindly tell me if any checks on the recruiting-fund have lately been presented for payment?" he eagerly asked.

The captain was referred to the book-keeper, and that official called him within the railing.

"No less than four checks were brought here yesterday for payment, and they came between half-past two and three o'clock in the afternoon," was the book-keeper's report. "There seemed to us something wrong in the simultaneous presentation of the four, and I was on the point of addressing a note to you this morning to ask you to come down to the bank. Everything about it appears in proper shape and form, except that three of the checks have been endorsed payable to your clerk, William Taintor, who came in person and drew the money."

"Let me see the checks, if you please," said the captain.

They were speedily produced. Lane took them to the window and closely examined them.

"I could not tell them," he said, "from my own handwriting; and yet those three checks are forgeries. I believe that the endorsements on the back are equally forgeries. Now, can I take these with me to the office of the Chief of Police? or do you desire that the detectives should be sent here? Taintor deserted last night, and all traces have been lost. What is the amount that he has drawn?"

"One check, payable to the order of William Hayden for board furnished to the recruiting-party, is to the amount of forty-five dollars and fifty cents. The second, payable to James Freeman, and endorsed by him to William Taintor, as was the first, is for rent of the building occupied by the recruiting rendezvous, precisely similar in form and amount to the previous checks, for the sum of sixty dollars. The third check is payable to William Taintor himself, marked 'for extra-duty pay as clerk at the recruiting office for the past six months.' The fourth is made payable to the order of Sergeant James Burns, 'extra-duty pay as non-commissioned officer in charge of the party for the six months beginning January 1 and ending June 30.'"

This check, too, had been endorsed payable to the order of William Taintor. All four checks, amounting in all to the sum of about one hundred and sixty dollars, had been paid to the deserting clerk during the afternoon of the previous day.

"Had you no suspicion of anything wrong?" said Lane.

"I knew nothing about it," said the book-keeper. "They were presented to the paying teller at the desk, and it was not until after bank was closed, when we came to balance up cash, that the matter excited comment and then suspicion. Taintor has frequently come here before with drafts and checks; and if you remember, sir, on one or two occasions he has been sent for new check-books when the old ones had run out."

"That's very true," said Lane. "He has been employed here in this rendezvous for the last ten years, and has borne, up to within my knowledge of him, an unimpeachable character. If any more checks come in, stop payment on them until you see me, and, if possible, detain the person who presents them."

Half an hour afterwards the captain was back in his office, and there, true to his appointment, was Lieutenant Noel.

"I have had a strange and unpleasant experience, Noel," said Lane. "Most of my papers have been faultily made out. My clerk deserted last night and has turned out to be a most expert forger. He has stolen half a dozen checks from my book, made them out to the order of various parties, forged the endorsements himself, got the money yesterday afternoon, and cleared out, no one knows where."

"Great Scott, old man! that is hard luck! How much has he let you in for?" asked Noel, in the slang of the period.

"Only a hundred and sixty dollars, fortunately; and I have made that good this morning,—placed my own check to the credit of the recruiting-fund in the First National Bank, so that in turning over the funds to you there will be no loss. We have to make new papers for the clothing account; but as quickly as possible I will have them ready for your signature and mine."

"There is no hurry whatever, old fellow," answered Noel, cheerily. "I've come back from the regiment a little short of money, and I want to have a nest-egg in the bank to begin with. It's a good thing to have a fat cousin, isn't it? He has always been very liberal and kind to me, and, luckily, I've only drawn on him twice. So I'll hurry along."

Five minutes after Noel left, a district messenger entered with a note for Captain Lane. It was addressed to him in the handwriting of Mr. Vincent. He opened it with a trembling hand. It contained merely these words:

"I am obliged to leave for New York this afternoon. Can you come to my office at one o'clock? We can then talk without interruption; and I much desire to see you.

"T. L. V."

As the big bell on the city hall had struck one, Captain Lane appeared at the office of Vincent, Clark & Co., and was shown without delay into the private room of the senior partner. Mr. Vincent, looking even older and grayer in the wan light at the rear of the massive building, was seated at his desk and busily occupied with a book of memoranda and figures. He pushed back his chair and came forward at once at sight of Lane, and motioned to the clerk to retire. The cavalryman's heart was beating harder then he had any recollection of its ever doing before, except in her presence, and he felt that his knees were trembling. But the old gentleman's greeting gave him instant hope:

"I am glad you have come, my dear sir: I am glad to know a man who has been taught as I was taught. Young people nowadays seem to rush into matrimony without the faintest reference to their parents, and your letter was a surprise to me,—a surprise, that is, in the fact that you should have sought my permission at all.

"Take this chair, captain," he continued, as he returned to his desk. "I have much to say to you," he added, with a sigh. "Let me say at once that from what I know and have heard of you there is no man

of my acquaintance to whom I could intrust my daughter's future with more implicit confidence. It is true that both her mother and I had at one time other hopes and views for her, and that we wish your profession was not that of arms. And now I beg you to be patient with me, and to pardon my alluding to matters which you yourself broach in this —this most manful letter. You tell me that you are not dependent on your pay alone, but that from investments in real estate in growing cities in the West and in mines in New Mexico your present income is some five thousand dollars. As I understand you, the property is steadily increasing in value?"

"It has steadily increased thus far, sir, and I think it will continue to do so for several years to come,—in the real estate investments at least."

"I am glad of this, on your account as well as hers, for Mabel has been reared in comparative luxury. She has never known what it was to want anything very much or very long. She has been educated on the supposition that her whole life would be one equally free from care or stint; and if I were to die to-morrow, sir, she would be a beggar."

And here, in great agitation, the old gentleman rose from his chair and began nervously pacing up and down the little room, wringing his white, tremulous hands, and turning his face away from the silent soldier, that he might not see the tears that hung to the lashes, or the piteous quivering of the sensitive lips. For a moment or two nothing more was said. Then, as though in surprise, Mr. Vincent stopped short.

"Did you understand me, Captain Lane? I do not exaggerate the situation in the least. I do not know how soon the axe will fall. We are safe for to-day, but know not what the morrow may bring forth. I may be met *en route* by telegrams saying that the journey is useless,—that we are ruined,—and the money I hope to get in New York to tide us over would come only too late. Next month at this time the house in which Mabel was born and reared may be sold over her head, with every scrap and atom of its furniture, and we be driven into exile. Do you realize this, sir? Do you understand that if you win her affection and she become your wife I have not a penny with which to bless her?"

"Mr. Vincent," answered Lane, "I would hold myself richer than any man in this world if I could know that your daughter cared for me and would be my wife. Do not think that I fail to sympathize and feel for you and all who are dear to you in your distress and anxiety, but I am almost glad to hear that she is not the heiress people said she was. It is Mabel I want,"—and here his voice trembled almost as much as the old man's, and his honest gray eyes filled up with tears he could not down,—"and with her for my own I could ask nothing of any man. I have your consent to see her, then, at once if need be? You know I am relieved from duty here and must rejoin my regiment within ten days."

"My full consent, and my best wishes, captain," said Mr. Vincent, grasping the outstretched hand in both his own. "You have not spoken to her at all?"

"Not a word, Mr. Vincent; and I can form no idea what her answer will be. Pardon me, sir, but has she or has Mrs. Vincent any knowledge of your business troubles?"

"My wife knows, of course, that everything is going wrong and that I am desperately harassed; Mabel, too, knows that I have lost much money—very much—in the last two years; but neither of them knows the real truth,—that even my life-insurance is gone. A year ago I strove to obtain additional amounts in the three companies in which I had taken out policies years ago. Of course a rigid examination had to be made by the medical advisers, and the result was the total rejection of my applications, and in two cases an offer to return with interest all the premiums hitherto paid. The physicians had all discovered serious trouble with my heart. Last winter our business was at its lowest ebb. I had been fortunate in some speculations on 'Change in the past, and I strove to restore our failing fortunes in that way. My margins were swept away like chaff, and I have been vainly striving to regain them for the last three months, until now the last cent that I could raise is waiting the result of this week's deal. Every man in all the great markets East and West knew three weeks ago that a powerful and wealthy syndicate had 'cornered,' as we say, all the wheat to be had, and was forcing the price up day by day; and I had started in on the wrong side. Even if the corner were to break to-morrow I could not recover half my losses. The offer the insurance companies made was eagerly accepted, sir: I took their money, and it dribbled away through my broker's fingers. If wheat goes up one cent, we cannot meet our obligations,—we are gone. We have been compelled to borrow at ruinous rates in order to meet our calls: I say we, for poor Clark is with me in the deal, and it means ruin for him too, though he, luckily, has neither wife nor child. Are you ready, sir, to ally your name with that of a ruined and broken man,—to wed a beggar's daughter?" And here poor old Vincent fairly broke down and sobbed aloud. Long watching, sleepless nights, suspense, wretched anxiety, the averted looks and whispered comments of the men he daily met on 'Change, the increasing brusqueness and insolence of his broker, Warden,—all had combined to humiliate and crush him. He threw himself upon the sofa, his worn old frame shaking and quivering with grief. The sight was too much for Lane. This was *her* father: it was her home that was threatened, her name that was in jeopardy.

"Mr. Vincent," he cried, almost imploringly, "I cannot tell you how utterly my sympathy is with you in your anxiety and distress. I beg you not to give way,—not to abandon hope. I—I think it may be in my power to help a little; only—it must be a secret between us. She—Mabel must never know."

VI.

In the three days that followed, the transfer of funds and property at the recruiting rendezvous took place, and Mr. Noel stepped in, *vice* Lane, relieved and ordered to join his regiment. The former was having a delightful time. A guest of the wealthy Witherses could not

long be a stranger within their gates to the Queen citizens, and every afternoon and evening found him enjoying hospitalities of the most cordial character. At the club he had already become hail-fellow with all the younger element and had made himself decidedly popular among the elders, and every man who had not met that jolly Captain Noel was eager to be presented to him. He was ready for pool, billiards, bowling, or a drink the moment he got within the stately door-way; and, as he sang, whistled, laughed, chatted, and cracked innumerable jokes during the various games, was a capital mimic, and could personate Pat, Hans, or Crapaud with telling effect, his presence was pronounced by every one as better than a solid week of sunshine,—something the Queen City rarely, if ever, experienced.

Poor Lane, on the contrary, was nearly worrying his heart out. He had gone to the Vincents' the very evening on which he had seen the father of the family off for New York, and had nerved himself to put his fortune to the test,—to tell her of his deep and devoted love and to ask her to be his wife. That she well knew he loved her, without being told, he felt sure must be the case; but, beyond a belief that she liked and trusted him, the captain had not the faintest idea as to the nature of her feelings towards him. He was a modest fellow, as has been said. His glass told him that, despite a pair of clear gray eyes and a decidedly soldierly cut to his features, he was not what women called a handsome man; and, what was more, there were little strands of gray just beginning to show about his broad forehead and in the heavy moustache that shaded his mouth. Lane sighed as he remembered that he was in his thirty-sixth year. How *could* she care for him,—fifteen years her senior? Lane rang the door-bell that night and felt once more that his heart was beating even as it did at one o'clock when he was ushered into the awful presence of her father.

"Miss Vincent has not left her room to-day, and is not well enough to come down to-night, sir," said the servant who came to the door, "and Mrs. Vincent begged to be excused because of Miss Mabel's needing her."

"I—I am very, very sorry," stammered the captain. "Please say that Mr. Lane called" (they had known him so well for two months as *Mr.* Lane that he could not yet refer to himself by his new title), "and—and would call again to-morrow, hoping to hear Miss Vincent was much better."

And then, dejected and miserable, and yet with something akin to the feeling one experiences when going to a dentist's to have a tooth drawn and the dreaded wielder of the forceps proves to be away, Lane retreated down the broad stone steps until he reached the walk, gazed up at the dim light in the window which he thought might be hers, anathematized himself for his lack of self-possession in not having asked whether there wasn't something he could bring her,—something she would like,—for the simple-hearted fellow would have tramped all night all over town to find and fetch it,—and then a happy thought occurred to him: "Women always love flowers." He ran to the next street, boarded a west-bound car, and was soon far down town at his favorite florist's.

"Give me a big box of cut flowers,—the handsomest you have," he said; and while they were being prepared he wrote a few lines on a card, tore it up, tried again on another, and similarly reduced that to fragments, and finally, though far from content, limited the expression of his emotions to the simple words,—

"*Do* get well by Saturday at latest. I cannot go without seeing you. F. L."

"Where shall we send them, sir?" asked the florist, as he came forward with the box in his hand.

"Never mind: I'll take it myself," was the answer, as the captain popped in the little missive.

And when he got back to the house the light was still burning in the window in the second story, and the doctor had just left, said the sympathetic Abigail, and had said that it was nothing serious or alarming: Miss Mabel would have to keep quiet a day or two; that was all.

But what hard luck for poor Lane, when the days of his stay were so very few! All Thursday morning was spent at the rendezvous, counting over property and comparing papers with Noel. Then, while that gentleman went to the club for luncheon the captain hastened to the Vincents' door to renew inquiries, and was measurably comforted by the news that Miss Mabel was much better, though still confined to her room. Would he not come in? Mrs. Vincent was out, but she thought—did that most intelligent young woman, Mary Ann—that perhaps there was a message for him. Like Mr. Toots, poor Lane, in his anxiety to put no one to any trouble, came within an ace of stammering, "It's of no consequence," but checked himself in time, and stepped into the bright parlor in which he had spent so many delicious hours listening to her soft rich voice as she sang, or as she chatted blithely with him and her frequent guests. It was some time before Mary Ann returned. Evidently, there was a message, for the girl's face was dimpled with smiles as she handed him a little note. "Miss Mabel says please excuse pencil, sir; she had to write lying down. Miss Holton has just gone away, after spending most of the morning."

Excuse pencil! Lane could hardly wait to read the precious lines. How he longed to give the girl a five-dollar bill! but this wasn't England, and he did not know how Mary Ann would regard such a proffer. She promptly and discreetly retired, leaving the front door open for his exit, and the sweet June sunshine and the soft warm breath of early summer flowing in through the broad vestibule.

"How good you are to me!" she wrote. "The flowers were—and are still—exquisite. I shall be down-stairs a little while to-morrow afternoon, if the doctor is good to me as you are. Then I can thank you, can I not? M. L. V."

The hours dragged until Friday afternoon came. He had to go to the Witherses' to dinner on Thursday evening, and a dreary, ostentatious, ponderous feast it was. Noel, in his full-dress uniform, was the hero of the hour. He greeted Lane a trifle nervously.

"I meant to have telephoned and begged you to bear me out, old man," said he, "but this thing was sprung on me after I got home. Cousin Mattie simply ordered me to appear in my war-paint, and I had to do it. You are to go in to dinner with her, by the way; and I wish you were *en grande tenue* instead of civilian spike-tail. Here's Amos."

And Amos marched him around to one guest after another,—"self-made men, sir,"—heavy manufacturers and money-makers, with their overdressed wives. Lane strove hard to be entertaining to his hostess, but that lady's mind was totally engrossed in the progress of the feast and dread of possible catastrophe to style or service. Her eyes glanced nervously from her husband to the butler and his assistants, and her lips perpetually framed inaudible instructions or warnings, and so it happened that the captain was enabled to chat a good deal with a slight, dark-eyed, and decidedly intelligent girl who sat to his right and who was totally ignored by the young cub who took her in,—the eldest son of the house of Withers, a callow youth of twenty.

"You did not hear my name, I know," she had said to him. "I am Miss Marshall, a very distant connection of Mrs. Withers's, the teacher of her younger children, and the merest kind of an accident at this table. Miss Faulkner was compelled to send her excuses at the last moment, and so I was detailed—isn't that your soldier expression?—to fill the gap."

"And where did you learn our army expressions, may I ask?" said Lane, smilingly.

"I had a cousin in the artillery some years ago, and visited his wife when they were stationed at the old barracks across the river. There's no one there now, I believe. Listen to Captain Noel: he is telling about Indian campaigns."

Indeed, pretty much everybody was listening already, for Noel, with much animation, was recounting the experiences of the chase after the Chiricahua chieftain Geronimo. He was an excellent talker, and most diplomatic and skilful in the avoidance of any direct reference to himself as the hero of the series of dramatic incidents which he so graphically told, and yet the impression conveyed—and intended to be conveyed—was that no man had seen more, endured more, or ridden harder, faster, and farther, than the narrator. Flattered by the evident interest shown by those about him, and noting that conversation was brisk at Lane's end of the table, the lieutenant soon lost himself in the enthusiasm of his own descriptions, and was only suddenly recalled to earth by noting that now the whole table had ceased its dinner-chat, and that, with the possible exception of the hostess, who was telegraphing signals to the butler, every man and woman present was looking at him and listening. The color leaped to his face, and he turned towards Lane with a nervous laugh.

"I'd no idea I was monopolizing the talk," he said. "Fred, old man, wasn't it G Troop that tried to get across the range from your command to ours when we neared the Guadalupe? Amos and Mr. Hawks had been asking me about the chase after Geronimo."

"Yes; it was G Troop,—Captain Greene's," answered Lane.

"You know that Captain Lane and I are of the same regiment,

and, though not actually together in the chase, we were in the same campaign," said Noel, apologetically, and then, quickly changing the subject, "By the way, Mr. Hawks, is Harry Hawks of the artillery a relative of yours?"

"A nephew, captain,—my brother Henry's son. Did you know him?"

"Know him? Why, he is one of the warmest friends I have in the whole army,—outside of my own regiment, that is. We were constantly together one winter when I was on staff duty in Washington, and whenever he could get leave to run up from the barracks he made my quarters his home. If you ever write to him just ask him if he knows Gordon Noel."

"Do you know, Captain Lane, that I have found your comrade captain a very interesting man?" observed Miss Marshall; and her eyes turned upon her next-door neighbor in calm but keen scrutiny.

"Noel is *very* entertaining," was the reply; and the dark-gray eyes looked unflinchingly into the challenge of the dark-brown.

"Yes, I have listened to his tales of the frontier, at breakfast, dinner, and during the evening hours, since Sunday last. They are full of vivacity and variety."

"One sees a good deal of strange country and many strange people in the course of ten or a dozen years' service in the cavalry."

"And must needs have a good memory to be able to tell of it all,—especially when one recounts the same incident more than once." And Miss Marshall's lips were twitching at the corners in a manner suggestive of mischief and merriment combined.

Lane "paused for a reply." Here was evidently a most observant young woman.

"There! I did not mean to tax your loyalty to a regimental comrade, captain: so you need not answer. Captain Noel interests and entertains me principally because of his intense individuality and his entire conviction that he carries his listeners with him. 'Age cannot wither nor custom stale his infinite variety;' but there should not be quite so much variety in his descriptions of a single event. This is the fourth time I have heard him tell of the night-ride from Carrizo's Ranch to Cañon Diablo."

"You have the advantage of me, Miss Marshall," answered Lane, his eyes twinkling with appreciation of her demure but droll exposure of Noel's weak point. "It is the first time I ever heard his version of it."

"It is the last time he will mention it in your presence, if he saw the expression in your face, Captain Lane."

"Do those introspective eyes of yours look clear through and see out of the back of your head, Miss Marshall? Your face was turned towards him. You stopped short in telling me of your cousin in the artillery and your visit to the barracks, and bade me listen to something I did not care half as much to hear as your own impressions of garrison-life. Never mind the quadruplex account of the night-ride. Tell me what you thought of the army."

"Well, of course the first thing a girl wants to know is what the

shoulder-straps mean; and I learned the very first day that the blank strap meant a second lieutenant, a single silver bar a first lieutenant, and two bars a captain,—that is, in the artillery. Now, why this provoking distinction in the cavalry? Here's a captain with only one bar, a captain whose letters from the War Department come addressed to *Lieutenant* Gordon Noel!"

"Noel never speaks of himself as captain, I'm sure," said Lane.

"Neither do you; and for a year past, ever since I have known you by sight,"—and here a quick blush mounted to her temples,—"you occasionally came to our church, you know," she hastened to explain,—"you have been referred to as Lieutenant Lane or Mr. Lane; but we know you are a captain now, for we saw the promotion recorded in the Washington despatches a fortnight ago. What was the date of Captain Noel's elevation to that grade? I confess I took him for your junior in the service and in years too."

"Yes, Noel holds well on to his youth," answered Lane, smilingly.

"And about the captaincy?"

"Well, he is so very near it, and it is so apt to come any day, that perhaps he thinks it just as well to let people get accustomed to calling him *that*. Then he won't have to break them all in when the commission *does* come."

"Then he is your junior, of course?"

"Only by a file or so. He entered service very soon after me."

"But was not in your class at West Point?"

"No: he was not in my class."

"In the next one, then, I presume?"

"Miss Marshall, is your first name Portia? I should hate to be a witness whom you had the privilege of cross-examining. There are ladies 'learned in the law,' and I expect to read of you as called to the bar within a year or two."

"Never mind, Captain Lane. I will ask you nothing more about him."

"No, Miss Marshall, I presume that my clumsiness has rendered it totally unnecessary."

That night, as the guests were dispersing, Lane did what most of them entirely omitted: he went over to the piano and bade Miss Marshall good-night.

"Captain Lane," she said, "I beg your pardon if I have been too inquisitive and too critical, as I know I have been; but you have taught me that you know how to guard a comrade's failings from the world. Will you not forgive a woman's weakness?"

"There is nothing to forgive, Miss Marshall. I hope sincerely that we may meet again before I go back to the regiment."

And later, as Lane was walking homeward from a final peep at the dim light in a certain window, he had time to think how intolerable that dinner would have seemed had it not been for the accident which placed that dark-eyed governess by his side.

VII.

Lane was awake with the sun on Friday morning, and lay for a few moments listening to the twittering of the sparrows about his window-sills, and watching the slanting, rosy-red shafts of light that streamed through the intervals in the Venetian blinds. "Does it augur bright fortune? Does it mean victory? Is it like the 'sun of Austerlitz'?" were the questions that crowded through his brain. To-day—to-day she was to "be down for a little while in the afternoon," and then she "hoped to be able to thank him. Could she?" Ten thousand times over and over again she could, if she would but whisper one little word—Yes—in answer to his eager question. It lacked hours yet until that longed-for afternoon could come. It was not five o'clock; but more sleep was out of the question, and lying there in bed intolerable. Much to the surprise of his darky valet, Lane had had his bath, dressed, and disappeared by the time the former came to rouse him.

Noel was late in reaching the rendezvous. It was after ten when he appeared, explaining that Mrs. Withers was far from well, and therefore Cousin Amos would not leave the house until the doctor had seen her and made his report. Lane received his explanation somewhat coldly, and suggested that they go right to work with their papers, as he had important engagements. It was high noon when they finished the matters in hand, and then the captain hastened to the club, and was handed a telegram with the information that it had only just come. It was evidently expected. Lane quickly read it and carefully stowed it away in an inside pocket. In another moment he was speeding down town, and by half-past twelve was closeted with the junior partner of the tottering house of Vincent, Clark & Co. Mr. Clark was pale and nervous; every click of the "ticker" seemed to make him start. A clerk stood at the instrument, watching the rapidly-dotted quotations.

"Have you heard from Mr. Vincent?" was the first question; and, without a word, a telegram was handed him. It was in cipher, as he saw at once, and Clark supplied the transcription:

"Rossiter refuses. Watch market closely. See Warden instant touches half. Break predicted here."

"Twenty minutes more!" groaned Clark, as he buried his face in his hands. "Twenty minutes more of this awful suspense!"

"What was the last report?" asked Lane, in a low voice.

"Ninety-eight and a quarter. My God! Think of it! Three-quarters of a cent between us and beggary! I could bear it, but not Vincent: 'twould kill him. Even his home is mortgaged."

There came a quick, sharp tap at the glazed door: the clerk's head was thrust in:

"Three-eighths, sir."

"It's time to move, then," said Lane. "I cannot follow you to the floor,—I have no ticket; but I will be awaiting your call at the Merchants' Exchange. Mr. Vincent has told you—— Better have it in Treasury notes,—one hundred each,—had you not?"

"I'll see Warden at once. D—n him! he would sell us out with no more compunctions than he would shoot a hawk."

"You infer that Mr. Vincent has had no success in raising money in New York?" asked Lane, as they hurried from the office.

"Not an atom! He made old Rossiter what he is,—hauled him out of the depths, set him on his feet, took him in here with him for ten years, sent him East with a fortune that he has trebled since in Wall Street, and now, by heaven! the cold-blooded brute will not lend him a pitiful twenty thousand."

At the bank Lane found an unusual number of men, and there was an air of suppressed excitement. Telegraph-boys would rush in every now and then with despatches for various parties, and these were eagerly opened and read. Scraps of low, earnest conversation reached him as he stood, a silent watcher. "They cannot stand it another day." "They've been raining wheat on them from every corner of the North and West. No gang can stand up under it." "It's bound to break," etc. To an official of the bank who knew him well he showed the telegram he had received at the club, and the gentleman looked up in surprise:

"Do you want this *now*, captain? Surely you are not——"

"No, I'm *not*, most emphatically," replied Lane, with a quiet laugh. "Yet I may have sudden use for that sum. I telegraphed to my agents at Cheyenne yesterday. You, perhaps, ought to wire at once and verify it."

"Those are our bank rules, and I presume it will be done; though of course we know——"

"Never mind. I much prefer you should, and at once." And, leaving the man of business to attend to the necessary formality, Lane strolled to a window and looked down the crowded street towards the massive building in which the desperate grapple 'twixt bull and bear was at its height. The day was hot; men rushed by, mopping their fevered brows; a throng of people had gathered near the broad entrance to the Chamber, and all its windows were lowered to secure free and fresh currents of air. Lane fancied he could hear the shouts of the combatants in the pit even above the ceaseless roar and rattle of wheels upon the stone pavement. Little by little the minute-hand was stealing to the vertical, and still no sign from Clark. "Has she touched a half yet?" he heard one man eagerly ask another as they dived into the broker's office underneath.

"Not yet; but I'm betting she does inside of five minutes and reaches ninety-nine first thing to-morrow."

At last, boom went the great bell,—a single, solemn stroke. There was a rush of men for the street, a general scurry towards the great Board of Trade building, a rapidly-increasing crowd along the curb-stones as the members came pouring out, and brokers and their customers hurried away towards numberless little offices all over the neighborhood. Dozens of them passed along under his post of observation, some flushed, some deathly pale, and finally Clark himself appeared, and Lane hastened forth to meet him.

"Saved by a mere squeak so far," was the almost breathless whisper

as Clark removed his hat and wiped his clammy forehead. "But we know not what a day may bring forth. It's a mere respite."

"Can the syndicate carry any more weight, think you? Prices jumped up two and three weeks ago. Now they only climb a hair's-breadth at a time. I hear they are loaded down,—that it *must* break; but I'm no expert in these matters."

"If you were, you'd be wise to keep out of it. Who can say whether they will break or not? It is what everybody confidently predicted when eighty-nine was touched twelve days ago; and look at it!"

"Do you go back to the office from here? Good! I'll join you there in ten minutes," said Lane, "for I shall not come down town this afternoon, and may not be able to in the morning."

And when Captain Lane appeared at the office of Vincent, Clark & Co. he brought with him a stout little packet, which, after the exchange of a few words and a scrap or two of paper, Mr. Clark carefully stowed in the innermost compartment of the big safe. Then he grasped Lane's hand in both of his, as the captain said good-by.

That afternoon, quite late, the captain rang at the Vincents' door, and it was almost instantly opened by the smiling Abigail whom he so longed to reward for her evident sympathy the day before, yet lacked the courage to proffer a greenback. Lane was indeed little versed in the ways of the world, howsoever well he might be informed in his profession.

"Miss Vincent is in the library, sir, if you will please to walk that way," was her brief communication; and the captain, trembling despite his best efforts to control himself, stepped past her into the broad hall, and there, hurrying down the stairway, came Mrs. Vincent, evidently to meet him. Silently she held forth her hand and led him into the parlor, and then he saw that her face was very sad and pale and that her eyes were red with weeping.

"I will only detain you a moment, captain," she murmured, "but I felt that I must see you. Mr. Vincent wrote to me on the train as he left here, and he tells me you know—the worst."

"Mr. Vincent has honored me with his confidence, dear lady; and I—saw Mr. Clark to-day."

She looked up eagerly: "What news had he from New York? Did he tell you?—about Mr. Rossiter, that is? I knew perfectly well what Mr. Vincent's hopes and expectations were in going."

"There was a telegram. I fear that he was disappointed in Mr. Rossiter; but the money was not needed up to the closing of the board at one o'clock."

"I am not disappointed. I thank God that the Rossiters refused him money. It will open his eyes to their real characters,—father and son. I would rather go and live in a hovel than be under obligations to either of them." And now the tears were raining down her cheeks.

"Do not grieve so, Mrs. Vincent," said Lane. "I cannot believe the danger is so great. I have listened to the opinions of the strongest men on 'Change this afternoon. A 'break' in this corner was pre-

dicted in New York at eleven this morning, and that is the universal opinion among the best men now."

"Yes, but it may be days away yet, and Mr. Vincent has confessed to me that his whole fortune hangs by a single hair,—that this wretched speculation has swallowed everything,—that a rise of a single penny means beggary to us, for he can no longer answer his broker's calls."

"That may have been so when he wrote; but Mr. Clark seems to have had a little better luck locally. I infer from what he told me that they were safe for to-day and could meet the raise of that critical cent or two: so that, despite the great loss they have sustained, there is not the certainty of ruin that so overwhelmed Mr. Vincent on Wednesday."

"You give me hope and courage," cried the poor, anxious-hearted woman, as she seized and pressed his hand. "And—and you come to us in the midst of our troubles! Mr. Vincent was so touched by your writing first to him: it brought back old days, old times, old fashions, that he loved to recall,—days when he, too, was young and brave and full of hope and cheer."

"And I have your good wishes, too, Mrs. Vincent?—even though I am only a soldier and have so little to offer her beyond—beyond——"

But he could not finish. He had looked into her face with such eager hope and delight when he began, yet broke down helplessly when he tried to speak of his great love for her sweet daughter.

"I know what you would say," she answered, with quick and ready sympathy. "I have seen how dear my child has been to you almost from the very first. Indeed I *do* wish you happiness, Mr. Lane; but Mr. Vincent told you that—we once had other views for Mabel. It is only fair and right that you should know."

"How could it have been otherwise, Mrs. Vincent? Is there any man quite worthy of her? Is there any station in life too high for one like her? I never dared hope that your consent could have been so freely given. I do not dare hope that she can possibly care for me —yet."

"I will not keep you longer, then," said she, smiling through her tears. "I shall see you after a while, perhaps. Mabel is in the library. Now I'll leave you."

With tumultuously-throbbing heart, he softly entered and quickly glanced around. The tiers of almost priceless volumes, the antique furniture, the costly Persian rugs and portières, the pictures, bronzes, bric-à-brac,—all were valueless in his eager eyes. They sought one object alone, and found it in a deep bay-window across the room. There, leaning back in a great easy reading-chair, with a magazine in her lap, her fair head pillowed on a silken cushion, reclined the lady of his heart, smiling a sweet welcome to him, while the rosy color mounted to her brows as he came quickly forward and took her soft, white hand. How he was trembling! How his kind gray eyes were glowing! She could not meet them: she had to look away. She had begun some pleasant little welcoming speech, some half-laughing allusion to the flowers, but she stopped short in the midst of it. A knot

of half-faded roses—his roses—nestled in her bosom, contrasting with the pure white of her dainty gown; and now those treasured, envied flowers began to rise and fall, as though rocked on the billows of some clear lake stirred by sudden breeze. What he said, he did not know: she hardly heard, though her ears drank in every word. She only realized that both his hands were tightly clasping hers, and that, scorning to seek a chair and draw it to her side,—perhaps, too, because he could not bear to release even for an instant that slender little hand,—perhaps still more because of the old-time chivalry in his nature that had prompted him to ask parental sanction before telling her of his deep and tender love,—Captain Lane had dropped on one knee close beside, and, bending over her, was pouring forth in broken, incoherent words the old, old story of a lover's hopes and fears and longings,—the sweet old song that, day after day, year after year, ay, though sung since God's creation of the beautiful world we live in, never, never can be heard or sung except in rapture. Even though she be cold to him as stone, no true woman ever listened to the tale of a man's true love without a thrill at heart. Once, once only, in the lifetime of men like Lane—yes, and of men not half his peers in depth of character, in intensity of feeling—there comes a moment like this, and, whether it be in the glow and fervor and enthusiasm of youth or the intensity and strength of maturer years, it is the climax of a lifetime; it is the date from which all others, all scenes, trials, triumphs, take their due apportionment; it is the memory of all others that lingers to the very last, when all, all but this are banished from the dying brain. Rome, in her pride of place, made the building of her Capitol the climax of mundane history: everything in her calendar was "*ante urbem conditam*" or the reverse. The old world measured from the Flood; the new world—our world—measures from the birth of Him who died upon the cross; and the lifetime of the man who has once deeply and devotedly loved has found its climax in the thrilling moment of the avowal.

"Have you no word to say to me, Mabel?—not one word of hope?—not one?" he pleaded.

Then she turned her lovely face, looking into his deep eyes through a mist of tears.

"I do like you," she murmured; "I do honor you so, Captain Lane; but that is not what you deserve. There is no one, believe me, whom I so regard and esteem; but—I do not know——I am not certain of myself."

"Let me try to win your love, Mabel. Give me just that right. Indeed, indeed I have not dared to hope that so soon I could win even your trust and esteem. You make me so happy when you admit even that."

"It is so little to give, in return for what you have given me," she answered, softly, while her hand still lay firmly held in the clasp of his.

"Yet it is so much to me. Think, Mabel, in four days at most I must go back to my regiment. I ask no pledge or promise. Only let me write to you. Only write to me and let me strive to arouse at least a little love in your true heart. Then by and by—six months, perhaps,

—I'll come again and try my fate. I know that an old dragoon like me, with gray hairs sprouting in his moustache——"

But here she laid her fingers on his lips, and then, seizing both her hands, he bowed his head over them and kissed them passionately.

The day of parting came, all too soon. Duty—the mistress to whom he had never hitherto given undivided allegiance—called him to the distant West, and the last night of his stay found him bending over her in the same old window. He was to take a late train for St. Louis, and had said farewell to all but her. And now the moment had arrived. A glance at his watch had told him that he had but twenty minutes in which to reach the station.

She had risen, and was standing, a lovely picture of graceful womanhood, her eyes brimming with tears. Both her hands were now clasped in his; she could not deny him *that* at such a time; but—but was there not something throbbing in her heart that she longed to tell?

"It is good-by now," he murmured, his whole soul in his glowing eyes, his infinite love betrayed in those lips quivering under the heavy moustache.

She glanced up into his face.

"Fred,"—and then, as though abashed at her own boldness, the lovely head was bowed again almost on his breast.

"What is it, darling? Tell me," he whispered, eagerly, a wild, wild hope thrilling through his heart.

"Would it make you happier if—if I—told you that I knew myself a little better?"

"*Mabel!* Do you mean—do you care for me?"

And then she was suddenly clasped in his strong, yearning arms and strained to his breast. Long, long afterwards he used to lift that travelling-coat of gray tweeds from the trunk in which it was carefully stowed away, and wonder if—if it were indeed true that her throbbing heart had thrilled through that senseless fabric, stirring wild joy and rapture to the very depths of his own.

"Would I be sobbing my heart out," at last she murmured, "if I did not love you and could not bear to have you go?"

VIII.

"What an awfully pretty girl that Miss Vincent is, Amos!" said Mr. Noel one morning, as the cousins were quietly breakfasting together before going down town.

"Pretty? yes," said Amos, doubtfully. "But look here, my boy: recollect that you want to think of something more than 'pretty' in selecting a wife while you are in here on this detail. Now, Mrs. Withers and I have been keeping our eyes open, and our ears too, for that matter: the fact is, I always have both eyes and ears open,—travel with them that way, sleep with them that way. I would not be the man I am in the business world, Noel, if that weren't the case. And, pretty though Miss Vincent may be, she's not the girl for you to waste your time on."

"But why not?" asked Noel. "They have a magnificent home,

and everything about it indicates wealth and refinement and culture; and there is no denying that she is one of the most attractive girls in society in this city: certainly I have seen none whom I have admired more."

"That is all very true, perhaps," was the reply; "but her father was very badly bitten during that wheat corner last month, and in fact he has been losing heavily for the last two years. Warden, who is his broker on 'Change, let it leak out in more ways than one; and that wife of Warden's is a regular scandal-monger,—she can't help talking, and everything she manages to extract from him in the way of information goes broadcast over the entire city. Of course, when the corner broke, as it did, old Vincent managed to pull out of it without absolute loss of his homestead and his entire business. But the rally came only in the nick of time. I am told that Warden has said that if wheat had gone up one cent higher it would have knocked Vincent out of time; he never could have come to again. Gordon Noel, we have another plan for you. Wait until Ned Terry's sister gets back from the East; between her and her brother they have just about as much money invested in the best-paying business in this town as any people that I can possibly name. She's a belle; she's just as pretty as Miss Vincent. She isn't as smart, perhaps, but she is a woman worth cultivating. Now, hold your horses. Where did you meet her, by the way?"

"I first met her at the Thorntons' dinner-party. She was there with Captain Lane, and some other young people whom I had not previously met."

"Oh, yes; that reminds me. It seems to me I have heard once or twice that your friend Lane was very much smitten in that quarter. Now, you'd much better let him carry off Miss Vincent, if he can. She would suit his modest views of life very well. But I don't believe the girl has a penny to her fortune; at least she certainly won't if Vincent has no more luck in the future than he has had in the last year."

"I took her down to dinner," said Noel, thoughtfully, "and I remember that she talked a good deal about the army, and asked a great many questions about the cavalry. Now that you speak of it, I noticed that Lane, who sat on the opposite side of the table, didn't seem to be particularly interested in the lady whom he was escorting, although of course he had to be civil and tried to keep up a conversation, but every now and then I would catch him looking at us, and particularly at her. But she looked so pretty that I didn't wonder at it."

"When did you next see her?" said Withers.

"Only last night. You know, I was called away almost immediately after the Thornton affair, and had to go on to New York on the court-martial, where I was summoned as a witness, then only got back in time for the party last night. That was my second meeting with her, and by this time Lane had gone out to join the regiment. I didn't even have a chance to say good-by to him. Do you think, really, that he was smitten in that quarter?"

"That's what I certainly heard," said Withers; "and as soon as

you get to know young people in society, I venture to say that you can readily find out all about it. These girls all know one another's secrets, and are generally pretty ready to tell them. That's the result of my experience."

It was evident that Amos Withers's cousin was not to be neglected in the Queen City. Two parties at private houses, a reception at the club, and three dinners were the invitations which he found awaiting him at his office. Half an hour was occupied in acknowledging and accepting or declining, as happened to be the case, these evidences of hospitality; then, having no especial interest in the morning paper, his thoughts again reverted to what Mr. Withers had been telling him about Miss Vincent, and the possible relation between her and his regimental comrade. He had been very much impressed with her the night before. Her beauty was of such a rare and radiant character, she was so genial and unaffected in her manner, so bright and winning, with such an evident liking for his society, that Mr. Noel had come away flattering himself that he had made in this quarter a most favorable impression. He had thought of her very much as he went home from the party,—of her interested face, as he talked or danced with her; and she danced delightfully, and was so good as to say that his step perfectly suited hers. He remembered now, too, her remark that it was so delightful to dance with army officers, and graduates of the Point, they all seemed to feel so thoroughly at home on the floor.

Noel was not a graduate of the Point by any means; but he saw no reason for disenchanting her on that score. He was quite as good as any of the West-Pointers, in his own opinion, and in society was very much more at home than many of their number. As a dancer he was looked upon in his regiment and throughout the cavalry as one of the most accomplished in the whole service. And all this interest and all this cordiality he had accepted without hesitation as a tribute to his own superior qualifications and attractiveness. It was therefore with a feeling akin to pique that he heard of this possible engagement existing between her and Captain Lane.

In all the Eleventh Cavalry there was no man whom Gordon Noel feared and possibly hated more than he did Captain Lane. This arose from the fact that Lane as adjutant of the regiment had seen all the communications that passed from time to time relative to Noel's absence from his command when his services were most needed and when any man of spirit would have taken every possible precaution to be with it. He knew how silent Lane had always been, and how thorough a custodian of regimental secrets he was considered. But all the same the mere fact that Lane knew all these circumstances so much to his disadvantage, and had seen all his lame and impotent excuses, had made him fear him as a possible enemy and hate him simply because he stood in awe of him.

No one, to watch Noel in society or in the presence of his brother officers, would suppose for a moment that he looked upon Lane with other than feelings of the warmest regard and comradeship. It was only in his secret thoughts, which he admitted to no soul on earth, that Noel realized what his real feelings were towards a man who had never

done him a wrong, but who had treated him on all occasions, public and private, with courtesy and consideration.

For some reason or other the lieutenant felt restless and dissatisfied this morning. The atmosphere of the office was decidedly uncongenial. He was a man who rarely read anything, and to whom letter-writing was a bore. To be sure, he had little of it to do, for no man in the regiment had expressed a desire to hear from him. It was a hot, sultry day; the stylish white flannel suit in which he had arrayed his handsome self was wasting its elegance on the desert air of a bare and empty room, instead of being seen in the boudoirs of beauty or the billiard-rooms at the club. Business was slack: no recruits were coming in, and Mr. Noel could stand it no longer. A ring from his bell summoned the sergeant to the room.

"There doesn't seem to be any likelihood of recruits coming in such a day as this, sergeant," said Mr. Noel. "I'm going up to the club for a while; if anybody should come in, send one of the men up there for me; I'll return at once." And with that he took his straw hat and light cane and strolled leisurely up the street. His was a figure that many a man—and more women—would turn to look at more than once. Tall, slim, elegant in build, always dressed in excellent taste, Gordon Noel in any community would have been pronounced a remarkably presentable man. His face, as has been said, was very fine; his eyes dark and handsome, shaded by deep, thick lashes; his hair dark and waving; his moustache, dark and drooping, served only to enhance the brilliancy of the even white teeth that flashed underneath it in his frequent smiles and joyous laughter. One would say, in looking at Noel, that he was a man of singularly sunny disposition; and so he was, and so they found him at the club; and so the loungers there hailed him with jovial shouts as he entered; for, though only a fortnight had elapsed since his arrival, and four days of that time he had been absent, giving his testimony before the court-martial in New York harbor, he had nevertheless won his way into the hearts of all the young fellows around the club, and no more popular man than Gordon Noel had ever come within the doors of "The Queen City."

"What are you going to have, old man?" was the first question asked, and Noel laughingly ordered a sherry-cobbler, saying the day was far too hot for anything stronger.

"Who's that I just saw going into the billiard-room?" he asked.

"That? that's Regy Vincent. Haven't you met him yet?"

"Regy Vincent," said Noel. "Is he the brother of the Miss Vincent whom I met at the party last night?"

"The very same," was the reply. "Mighty bright fellow, too, and a very jolly one; though he has been in hard luck of late."

"How in hard luck?" asked a quiet-looking man seated in a big arm-chair, lowering for a moment the newspaper which he had been reading.

"Well, through his father's ill luck on 'Change. You all know, of course, that Vincent was nearly busted before that corner went under last week."

"I know this," was the calm reply, "that while he did stand for a

few days on the 'ragged edge,' and while it may be that had that corner not broken when it did he would have been in sore straits, in some way he or his partner, Clark, came to taw with additional funds, and had the consummate pluck to put up more at the very moment when it was believed that that syndicate was going to have everything their own way. So far from being badly bitten by that deal, it's my belief that Vincent, Clark & Co. came out of it with a very pretty penny to the good."

"Well, of course, Harris, you must know more about it than I do. But you cannot be gladder than I am to hear that Vincent's status is so much better than we supposed. I'm glad on his account, I'm glad on Regy's account, and I'm particularly glad on Miss Mabel's account. And now I'm particularly chuckling over Billy Rossiter's frame of mind when he hears the real truth of this matter. When he went after her to Rome last year, and everybody supposed that Vincent was worth a million, there's no doubt in the world that he did his best to win her, and that was what he was sent abroad by his father to do. But he didn't win her then, for she strenuously denied any engagement when she came back here; yet it was supposed that if he persevered his chances would be good. Why, he's not half a bad fellow, only he can't marry so long as he is in his father's employ and dependent on him, unless he marries according to his father's wishes; and the old man called him off just as soon as he found out that Vincent was on the verge of failure. Billy Rossiter has lost any chance that he might have had in that quarter; for she'll never look at him again."

"Served him right, if that be the case. Any man who hasn't sense enough to stick to a girl who is bright and pretty as Mabel Vincent, rich or poor, deserves no luck at all in this world. But that reminds me, Captain Noel, according to rumor and what the girls say in society,—and you know they generally know pretty much everything that is going on,—there is something more than a mere understanding between her and your predecessor here, the recruiting officer, Lieutenant Lane. Did he say anything about it to you?"

"No, not a word. I think, though, that had there been anything in the story Lane would have let me know something about it, for we are very old and intimate friends. Did you say that that was Mr. Reginald Vincent who has just gone into the billiard-room?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Morris, "that's he. Would you like to know him?"

"Very much indeed; and if you've nothing better to do, come in and present me. Perhaps he will want to play a game of billiards, and if so I'm his man."

And so it happened that, that very morning, Gordon Noel was presented to Reginald Vincent, and when Regy went home to luncheon he spoke enthusiastically of his new-found acquaintance, whom he pronounced to be one of the most delightful fellows he had ever met anywhere, and who was such a warm and devoted friend of Captain Lane. "I want, if I meet him this afternoon, as I probably shall, to bring him back to dinner with me. What say you, mother?—just informally."

"Don't you think it would be better to wait a day or two, and have a little dinner, and invite a few friends to meet him?" asked Mrs. Vincent. "Your father, perhaps, would like to be consulted in the matter. I've no doubt that he would like to do something to show attention to any friend of Captain Lane's. What do you think, Mabel?"

"I vote for both," replied that young woman, with much alacrity. "I have met Mr. Noel twice."

"Captain Noel, dear," said Regy; "Captain Noel."

"He is not a captain yet, Reginald: I happen to know from the regimental roster: I have a copy up-stairs, that Captain Lane very kindly left me." And here a decided blush stole up the fair cheeks of the young lady. "I learned a good deal about the officers of the regiment from Mr. Lane—Captain Lane—while he was here. Mr. Noel ranks second among the lieutenants of the regiment. As Captain Lane said, he is so very near his captaincy that perhaps he accepts the title that you all give him at the club as only a trifle premature."

"Well, captain or lieutenant, it doesn't make any difference," said Regy, impulsively: "he's a mighty good fellow, and a mighty good friend of your friend Captain Lane, and if you have no objection, mother, I'll bring him around to dinner to-night, and then perhaps we might go to the theatre afterwards. I'm very sure that Captain Noel will enjoy it. Fact is, he enjoys everything. Everybody in the club is perfectly delighted with him. You ought to hear him sing an Irish song or tell a French story! I'll try and get him started when he comes here. He's a wonderful mimic; and he's so full of information about their service on the frontier. Now, Lane so seldom spoke of anything of the kind; but Noel will talk for hours at a time about the wonderful country through which they have scouted and fought, and all that they have been through in their campaigns. By Jove! but that fellow has seen a lot of hard service, and has been through some hair-breadth escapes!"

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Vincent; "Captain Lane or Mr. Noel?"

"Noel, of course,—Noel I'm speaking of. Lane, no doubt, saw a great deal of service with the regiment; but Noel says that he was adjutant so much of the time, and on other staff-duty, while he (Noel) was almost incessantly scouting, hunting after various Indian parties, and being on the war-path, as he laughingly expresses it."

"Does he mean that Captain Lane didn't see much actual service there?" asked Miss Mabel, with heightened color.

"Oh, I don't know that he means that. Don't understand me as saying for a moment that Noel disparages Lane's services; on the contrary, he never speaks of him except with the most enthusiastic regard. Neither does he boast at all of his own service; only you can't help seeing, in the modest, off-hand way in which he speaks of his campaigning, what a deal of hardship and danger he has encountered for the simple reason that he was with the command that had to go through it all."

"Your father tells me," said Mrs. Vincent, "that he met him one

day on 'Change when Mr. Withers brought him in; that was before the crash, and when he had no time to pay him any attention. Of course the cousin of Mr. Amos Withers was received with a great deal of bowing and scraping by Mr. Withers's friends in that honorable body. But all the same I know your father will be glad to meet Mr. Noel now; and by all means bring him, if you feel disposed, to-night. What manner of looking man is he?"

"A remarkably handsome man, mother," said Mabel, at once,—"one of the handsomest I ever saw; and he certainly made himself very entertaining and very jolly the night we sat together at dinner at the Thorntons'."

"There's a great contrast physically between him and Lane," put in Regy. "Noel is such an elegantly built fellow,—so tall and fine-looking. Lane would be almost undersized when standing beside him, and is very much at a disadvantage when they appear together, I should judge."

A very bright and joyous party it was, seated around the home-like table of the Vincents that evening, and, as Regy had predicted, Noel proved very entertaining and a most agreeable guest. While showing much deference to Mr. Vincent and attention to his good wife, he nevertheless managed to have a great deal to say about the regiment and its daring and perilous service on the frontier, and to throw in here and there many a pleasant word about Captain Lane and their long and intimate acquaintance, and before dinner was over had won a warm place in Mabel Vincent's heart by the way in which he so frequently spoke of the man to whom she had plighted her troth.

And that very evening, as Frederick Lane,—far out under the star-lit sky of Arizona,—with his heart full of longing and love for her, and thinking only of her as he rode over the desolate plain with the lights of old Fort Graham already in view, Mabel Vincent, seated by Gordon Noel's side, was looking up into his handsome face and listening to his animated voice between the acts of "Twelfth Night."

IX.

Only a short distance from the Arizona border, with the blue range of the Santa Catarina shutting out the sunset skies, with sand and cactus and Spanish bayonet on every side, the old post of Fort Graham stood in the desert like a mud-colored oasis. All the quarters, all the store-houses, stables, corrals, and barracks, were built of the native *adobe;* and though whitewash had been liberally applied, especially about the homes of the officers, and the long Venetian blinds at their front windows had been painted the coolest of deep greens, and clear running water sparkled through the *acequias* that bordered the parade, it could not be denied that at its best Graham was an arid and forbidding station, so far as one could judge by appearances. Trees, verdure, turf, were items almost unknown within a day's march of the flag-staff; but in the old times when the Navajoes were the terror of the wide Southwest and even the Comanches sometimes carried their raids across

the Rio Bravo del Norte—the Rio Grande of to-day—the post had been "located" where it might afford protection to the "Forty-Niners" and to the pioneers of the prairies; the trans-continental trail led past its very gates, and many a time and oft the miner and the emigrant thanked God and the general government that the old fort was placed just where it was, for Indian pursuers drew rein when once in sight of its dingy walls; and so from year to year for more than thrice a decade the flag was raised at sunrise, the post was always garrisoned; and now, with the Southern Pacific piercing the range but a short distance below, and landing stores and forage at the quartermaster's dépôt within four miles of the corrals, it became easier to maintain a force of cavalry at Graham; and one of the troops there stationed was Lane's new command, the relict of the late lamented Curran, "the Devil's own D."

An easy-going old dragoon was Curran, and for years before his retirement it was an open secret that his first sergeant "ran the troop" to suit himself and that the captain never permitted his subalterns to interfere. A more independent, devil-may-care, and occasionally drunken lot of troopers were rarely gathered in one such organization, and, while steady and reliable men on getting their discharges at the end of their term of enlistment would refuse to "take on" again in D Troop, but would go over to Captain Breese or perhaps to a company at another station, all the scamps and rollicking characters in the regiment would drift over into "D" and be welcomed by the choice spirits therein assembled. And this was the gang that Captain Lane was now expected to bring up with a round turn and transform into dutiful soldiers. Obedient to the colonel's behest, he had stopped over a couple of days at head-quarters, had had a most cordial greeting from every officer at the post, had called on all the ladies,—not omitting his fair defamers,—and then had hastened on to Graham and his new and trying duties. Every day, as he was whirled farther away from the home of her whom he so devotedly loved, he wrote long letters to her, filled with—only lovers know what all. And his heart leaped with joy that topmost in the little packet of letters awaiting him at the adjutant's office when he reached his post was a dainty billet addressed to him in her beloved hand. Until he could get his quarters in habitable condition the new troop-commander was the guest of Captain and Mrs. Nash; and he could hardly wait for the close of that amiable woman's welcoming address to reach his room and devour every word of that most precious missive. She had written—bless her!—the very day after he left, and a sweet, womanly letter it was,—so shy and half timid, yet so full of faith and pride in him. Every one at Graham remarked on the wonderful change for the better that had come over Lane since he went East. Never had they seen him so joyous, so blithe in manner. He seemed to walk on air; his eyes beamed on every one; his face seemed "almost to have a halo round it," said Mrs. Nash, and neither she nor any woman in garrison had the faintest doubt as to the explanation of it all. Love had wrought the change, and being loved had intensified and prolonged it. Every man—every woman in garrison was his friend, and the happy fellow would gladly

have taken dozens of them into his confidence and told them all about it, and talked by the hour of her.

But there were reasons, Mrs. Vincent had said, why it was most desirable that there should be no announcement of the engagement as yet. What these were she did not explain to Mabel herself, but assured her that it was her father's wish as well. Lane had rushed to the great jewelry-house of Van Loo & Laing, and the diamond solitaire that flashed among the leaves of the exquisite rose-bud he smilingly handed her that night was one to make any woman gasp with delight. Could anything on earth be rich enough, pure enough, fair enough, to lavish on her, his peerless queen?

She had held forth her soft white hand and let him slip it on the engagement finger and then bend the knee like knight of old and kiss it fervently. She revelled in it, rejoiced in it, but, heeding her mother's advice, stowed it away where none could see it, in the secret drawer of her desk, and Lane was perfectly satisfied. "I will tell you the reason some day," Mrs. Vincent had said to him, "but not just now, for I might be doing wrong;" and he had protested that she need never tell him. What cared he, so long as Mabel's love was his, and they understood each other as they did?

And so, while people at Graham plied him with questions and insinuations and side-remarks about the "girl he left behind him" in the East, he kept faithfully to the agreement, and though all the garrison knew he wrote to her every day and took long rides alone that he might think of her, doubtless, and though every one knew that those dainty missives that came so often for Captain Lane were written by Miss Mabel Vincent, never once did he admit the existence of an engagement,—never once until long afterwards.

The first real tidings that the Graham people had of her came in a letter from head-quarters. Mrs. Riggs had had such a long, charming letter from Mr. Noel that she called in several of her cronies and read it all to them; and that very evening one of the number, unable to bear the burden of so much information, shifted it from her mental shoulders by writing it all to Mrs. Nash. Perhaps the best plan will be to read the extract which referred to Lane exactly as Mr. Noel wrote it:

"By this time I presume Fred Lane is busily engaged with his new troop. I served with them in the Sioux campaign, and they never gave me any trouble at all. So, too, in the Geronimo chase a while ago, when Major Brace picked me out to go ahead by night from Carrizo's I asked for a detachment from D Troop, and the men seemed to appreciate it. I knew they would follow wherever I would lead, and would stand by me through thick and thin. If Lane starts in right I've no doubt they will do just as well for him; but I expect he is feeling mighty blue at having to rejoin just now. You know I've always been a warm friend of his, and it hurt me to see him so unwilling to go back. No one seemed to know him very well in society; and it's very queer, for this was his old home,—and I was never more delightfully welcomed anywhere; the people are charming. But Lane had

held himself aloof a good deal, and fellows at the club say he didn't 'run with the right set.' Then, if all accounts be true, he had had hard luck in several ways. I'm told that he lost money in a big wheat speculation, and everybody says he totally lost his heart. I tell you this in confidence because I know you are a devoted friend of his,—as indeed you are of all in the dear old regiment,—but he was much embarrassed when it came to turning over the funds. There was quite a heavy shortage, which he had to make up at a time when it was probably most inconvenient. As to the other loss, it isn't to be wondered at. She is a beautiful and most charming girl, and many a man, I fancy, has laid his heart at her feet. It is said, however, that Lane's loss is the heavier in this case because—well, I fear it will come to nothing. A young lady told me yesterday that there was something back of it all,—that she, Miss Vincent, was deeply in love with a Mr. Rossiter, of New York, and had been for over a year, and they were to have been married this coming September, but that the gentleman (?) learned that her father had been nearly swamped in speculation and had not a penny to give her. My informant went to school with Miss Vincent, and knows her intimately, and she says that Mr. Rossiter simply threw her over a short time ago, and that it was pique and exasperation and to hide her heart-break from the world that Mabel Vincent began to show such pleasure in Lane's devotions. She led him on, so her lady friends say; and now Mr. Rossiter has found out that old Vincent was sharper and shrewder than any one supposed and made instead of losing a pile, and now he is suing to be taken back, and they say that she is so much in love with the fellow that the chances are all in his favor. This is why I feel such sorrow and anxiety for Lane.

"Well, I led the german at a lovely party at the Prendergasts' last night. Miss Vincent was there, looking like a peach-blossom, and we danced together a great deal. When it came time to break up I believe half the people in the rooms came to say good-night to me and to tell me they had never seen so delightful a german,—'everything so depends on the leader.' I have invitations for something or other for every night for the next fortnight; and yet I so often long for the old regiment and the true friends I had to leave. It did me a world of good last night to meet old Colonel Gray, of the retired list, whose home is here, but he commanded the —th Infantry in the Sioux campaign, and when he saw me he threw his arms around my neck and hugged me before the whole throng of people. Give my love to our chief, always, and believe me, dear, true friend of mine,

"Yours most affectionately,

"GORDON NOEL."

Condensed, edited by feminine hands, and accented here and there as suited the writer's mood, this was the letter which formed the basis of the one received by Mrs. Nash. Lane by this time was cosily ensconced in his quarters, and was giving all his time to the improvement of affairs about his troop's barracks, kitchens, and stables, to drill- and target-practice, and to company duties generally. His days knew no

relaxation from labor from reveille until "retreat" at sunset, and then came the delicious evenings in which he could write to her and read a chapter or two of some favorite work before going early to bed. After the first week he seldom left his house after eight o'clock, and the garrison had therefore ample opportunity to discuss his affairs. Some color was lent to the story of his having lost money in speculation by a letter received from Cheyenne written to the new major of the ——th Infantry, who had recently joined by promotion from Fort Russell, near that thriving town. The writer said that Lane of the Eleventh Cavalry had sold his property there for fifteen thousand dollars about the end of June, and he had bought it for twenty-five hundred only nine years before. He could have got eighteen thousand just as well by waiting a few days; but he wanted the money at once.

No one, of course, could ask the captain any direct questions about his affairs of either heart or pocket, but Lane was puzzled to account for some of the remarks that were made to him,—the interrogatories about the methods of speculation, the tentatives as to chances of "making a good thing" in that way, and the sharp and scrutinizing glances that accompanied the queries. The sweet, sympathetic, semi-confidential manner, the inviting way in which the ladies spoke to him of his present loneliness and their hopes that soon he would bring to them a charming wife to share their exile and bless his army home,—all this, too, seemed odd to him; but, as he had never been in love nor engaged before, he did not know but that it was "always the way with them," and so let it pass.

And then he was very happy in her letters. They were neither as frequent nor as long as his, but then she had such a round of social duties; she was in such constant demand; there were visitors or parties every night, and endless calls and shopping-tours with mother every day, and she was really getting a little run down. The weather was oppressively warm, and they longed to get away from the city and go to the mountains. It was only a day's ride to the lovely resorts in the Alleghanies, but papa was looking a little thin and worn again, and the doctors had said his heart was affected,—not alarmingly or seriously, but mamma could not bear to leave him, and he declared it utterly impossible to be away from his business a single day. He and Mr. Clark were very hopeful over a new venture they had made, the nature of which she did not thoroughly understand.

But let us take a peep at some of those early letters,—not at the answers to his eager questions, not at the shy words of maiden love that crept in here and there, but at those pages any one might read.

"Tuesday night.

". . . Such a delightful german as we had last night at the Prendergasts'! Captain Noel led—I have to call him captain, for every one does here, and if I say 'Mr.' they want to know why, and it is embarrassing to explain how I know. He leads remarkably well, and I was very proud of 'our regiment,' sir, when listening to all the nice things said about him. How I wished for a certain other cavalry captain, now so many cruel miles away! Mr. Noel took me out often,—and

indeed I was a decided belle,—and he told me that he had to lead with Miss Prendergast, but would so much rather dance with me.

"It is almost settled that we go away in August for the entire month. Dr. Post says mother must go, and that father ought to go. Of course I go with mamma. Deer Park will doubtless be the favored spot. I wish August were here; I wish you were here; I wish—oh, so many things! Your letters are such a delight to me. I wonder if other girls have anything like them. Yes, you shall have the picture on my birthday; but mind, sir, you are to take the utmost care of it, or the original will feel neglected."

"Friday night.

". . . So many interruptions to-day, dear Fred! You see what an incoherent thing this is thus far, and now I'm tired out. We had a charming time at the Woodrows' dinner last evening. The day had been hot, but their table was set on the lawn under a canopy, and, the walls being raised, we had a delightful breeze from the river. Their place is one of the finest on the heights. I did so wish you could have seen it. Captain Noel took me in, and was so bright and jolly and full of anecdote. Everybody likes him, and I like him mainly because he is such a loyal friend of yours. He talks so much of you and of all the dangers you have shared in common; and you know how interesting all this must be to me. Sometimes I wonder that you had so little to say about him,—though you never *did* talk much about the regiment and never would talk much about yourself. Wednesday evening we had a little theatre-party. Regy got it up, and we just filled two adjoining loges. Captain Noel was Fanny Holton's escort, but he talked most of the time with me,—a thing that my escort, Mr. Forbes, did not seem to like; but, as he *couldn't* talk, and Mr. Noel would, what could I do?"

"Sunday evening.

"It is late, and I ought to be asleep, but the last caller has just gone, and to-morrow there may be no time to write at all, and you are such an exacting, tyrannical, dear old boy that—— Well, there, now, let me tell you of the day. You say anything and everything that I say or do is of interest. So, to begin with, yesterday I had a headache, due, I fear, to the late supper Regy gave us at the club after the theatre. Fanny Holton came to take me for a drive, but I did not feel like going, and begged off. Then she told me that Captain Noel was in the carriage waiting, and that he would be so disappointed. Mother came in and said the air would do me good; and so we went, and I came back feeling so much brighter. Mr. Noel was very amusing, and kept us laughing all the time. Coming home, Fanny got out at her house, as she had to dress for dinner, but told the coachman to drive me home and Mr. Noel to the club. He began talking of you the moment she disappeared, and said he so hoped you were going to write regularly to him. Are you? He seems so fond of you; but I do not wonder at that.

"This morning we went to church, and afterwards Mr. Noel joined and walked home with us, and papa begged him to come in to luncheon,

which he did. You dear fellow! what have you done to my beloved old daddy, that he is so ardent an admirer of yours? He shook Mr. Noel's hand three times before he would let him go, and begged him to come often: he liked to know men, he said, who could so thoroughly appreciate—whom do you think, sir?—Captain Fred Lane. After he had gone, papa spoke of him delightedly on two or three occasions. Will they take him away too as soon as he is really a captain?"

"Wednesday.

"You dear, dear, extravagant fellow! Never have I had such exquisite flowers, or such profusion of them. You must have given your florist *carte blanche*. Nothing that came to me compared with them. My birthday was the cause of quite a little *fête* in the family, and I had some lovely presents. Mr. Noel, too, sent a beautiful basket of roses, and it pleased me very much. I want your comrades to like me, and yet I know he did this on your account. Though he is so thoughtful and delicate and never refers to our engagement, I feel that he knows it; and it seems better that way, somehow.

"You did not answer my questions about him, Fred. Didn't you read my letter?"

Among the letters that came from the Queen City was one which bore the tremulous superscription of the head of the firm of Vincent, Clark & Co. It was brief, but it gave Captain Lane a thrill of gladness:

"It was your timely and thoughtful aid that enabled us to recover so much of our losses. You alone came to our rescue, and I fully appreciate the risk you ran. It will never be forgotten.

"Clark will send draft for the entire am't, or deposit to your credit, as you may direct. I go to New York and Chicago in two or three days. Our prospects are flattering."

X.

August was close at hand. Queen City "society" had scattered in every direction. The mountains and the sea-shore were levying tribute on the plethoric pockets of the "big men" on 'Change and in business of every conceivable kind. Blinds and shutters were closed at scores of hospitable mansions in the narrow streets of the old city and even in the elegant villas that crowned the surrounding heights. The sun-glare at mid-day was so intense that no man was safe in venturing forth without a huge sunshade of some kind, and even within the sacred precincts of the club, where broad awnings hung on every side and palm-leaf fans were in constant motion, the men strolled in to luncheon in shirts of lightest flannel or pongee, with rolling collars and infinitesimal neckties. Every one who could leave town had long since gone; and yet the Vincents lingered. Each day seemed to add to the anxiety in the mother's eyes as she watched her husband's aging face. He had returned from a business-trip of ten days or so looking hopeful and buoyant, and had gone to the office the following morning

with light step and cheery demeanor, but came home long after the dinner-hour listless and dispirited,—a severe headache, he said, but the wife knew that it was far more than head- or heartache. The family physician took occasion to warn Mr. Vincent that he was doing himself grievous wrong,—that his health imperatively demanded rest and change of scene. Vincent looked in the good old doctor's face with a world of dumb misery in his eyes, and only answered, "I will,—I will,—in a week or so. I cannot quit my post just now. Clark is taking his vacation. When he returns I'll go." And until he could accompany them Mrs. Vincent refused to budge; and yet she began to urge that Mabel should start now. What was to prevent her going at once and joining the Woodrows at Deer Park? Clarissa and Eleanor Woodrow were always such friends of hers. But Mabel begged that she might stay until both papa and mamma could go too; she could not be content there without them, or at least without mother; and Mrs. Vincent could not find the words in which to frame the cause of her greatest apprehension.

The one man whom the heat was powerless to subdue was Gordon Noel. In the most immaculate and becoming costumes of white or straw color, that genial officer would saunter into the club at noontide, looking provokingly cool and comfortable, and, as he expressed it, "without having turned a hair."

"Hot!" he would say. "Call this hot? Why, bless your hearts, fellows, you ought to live in Arizona awhile! Gad! I've come in sometimes from a scout through the Gila desert and rushed for cold cream to plaster on my nose and cheeks: it would be all melted, of course; but when I clapped it on it would sizzle just like so much lard in a frying-pan. And down at Fort Yuma our hens laid hard-boiled eggs from June to October." And then his eyes would twinkle with fun, and he would bury his dark moustache in the cracked ice of his julep with infinite relish.

"I say," queried Mr. Morris of his chum, Terry junior, one languid afternoon after Noel had jauntily strolled away, "don't you envy a feller who can enjoy life like that?"

"Never saw anything like it!" quoth the younger. "One would suppose that after being a slave all mawning in those beastly works I ought to enjoy a little recreation; but I can't, you know."

"Queer ducks, those army fellers. Gad! this love-making by proxy is what gets me,—this sort of Miles Standish courtship business. She's prettier, though, than the original Priscilla."

"How do you mean?" queried young Terry, vaguely. He had been brought up under the thumb of his elder brother, and, from the outset, had been given to understand that if he expected to share in the profits he must learn the business. There had been no college for him, and New England legends were sealed books.

"Why, I mean that 'twouldn't surprise me a bit if we had a modern version of the old 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?' He's with her incessantly."

"Oh! Miss Vincent you're speaking of. Her name's Mabel, I thought, not—what'd you call her?"

"Never mind, Jimmy," said Morris, rising. "Come and have a cigarette."

And it was not only in the club, over their cigars, that men spoke significantly of Noel's attentions to the lovely daughter of the house of Vincent. It was not the men, indeed, who did the greater part of the talk. If *they* noticed and spoke of it, what must not the women have been saying! Noel, quitting the hospitable roof of Cousin Amos, had taken rooms down in town, midway between the club and the Vincent homestead, and those two points became the limits of his field of action. The Withers household had gone to the Maryland mountains, and the massive master of the establishment was treating himself to a month's vacation. Almost all the pretty girls were gone. What more natural than that Mr. Noel should so frequently seek the society of the prettiest of all, even if she were engaged to Frederick Lane, as people said she was before he went away? There was no monitorial Amos to call him off, no one to bid him turn his devotions elsewhere; and she herself could see no harm, for was not almost all his talk of Captain Lane? was he not his loyal and devoted friend? The captain's letters came every day, and he seemed pleased to know that Noel had such pleasant things to say of him, and was so attentive,—or rather kind, because it wasn't really on her account that he came so frequently. To be sure, Captain Lane did not say much about the matter one way or the other; and if he saw no harm, if he expressed no dissatisfaction, who else had any right to find fault?

Her mother, was the answer that conscience pricked into her heart quicker even than she could think. For days past the good lady's manner to Noel had been gaining in distance and coolness. "She is ill at ease,—worried about papa," was Mabel's attempt at a self-satisfying plea; but conscience again warned her that she knew better,—far better. Her father, engrossed in business cares that seemed only to increase with every day, had no eyes or ears for affairs domestic; and so it resulted that when Noel came sauntering in at evening with his jaunty, debonair, joyous manner, there was no one to receive him but Mabel, and he wanted no one more.

"Does Captain Lane know of this and approve it?" was the grave question her mother had at last propounded.

"I have written to him with the utmost frankness, mother," was Miss Vincent's reply, while a wave of color swept over her face and a rebellious light gleamed in her eyes, "and he has never hinted at such a thing as disapproval. He has more confidence in me than you have. If he had not——"

But the rest was left unsaid.

Poor Mrs. Vincent! She turned away, well knowing that argument or opposition in such matters was mistaken policy. The words that sprung to her lips were, "Alas! he does not know you as I do!" but she shut those lips firmly, rigorously denying herself the feminine luxury of the last word and the launching of a Parthian arrow that would have made, indeed, a telling shot. If heaven is what it is painted, there can be no more joy over the sinner that repenteth than

over the woman who tramples down her fiercest temptation and "bridleth her tongue." Mrs. Vincent deserved to be canonized.

And meantime how went the world with Lane? Faithful, honest, simple-hearted man that he was, holding himself in such modest estimate, marvelling as he often did over the fact that he could have really won the love of a being so radiant, so exquisite, as Mabel, he lived in a dream that was all bliss and beauty, except for the incessant and all-pervading longing to see her,—to be near her. He loved her with an intensity that he had no means of expressing. Not a waking instant was she absent from his thoughts, and in his dreams she appeared to him, crowned with a halo such as never angel knew. He used to lie awake at times in the dead hours of the night, wondering if the very newsboys and workmen of the city realized their blessed privilege, that they could step upon the flagstones her little foot had pressed, that they could see her face, perhaps hear her voice, as she strolled in the cool of evening along the gravelled pathway of the little park that adjoined her home. Loving her as he did, his heart went out to any one who knew her or was even familiar with the city where she dwelt. He had felt for years a contempt for Gordon Noel that, at times, he had difficulty in disguising. Now he was tempted to write to him, to shut out the past, to open confidential relations and have him write long letters that should tell of her. There were three men in his troop in whom he felt a vague, mysterious interest simply because they had been enlisted at the old rendezvous on Sycamore Street, only three squares from her home. He was so full of hope and faith and love and gratitude that the whole garrison seemed to hold naught but cheer and friendliness. He never dreamed of the stories the men were telling or the confidences women were whispering about the post. Noel had written again to Mrs. Riggs, and Mrs. Riggs had not spared her information. It was now said in Queen City society that the engagement was of Mr. Vincent's making. He had been associated with Lane in some speculations that proved disastrous, but the captain had shown such command of money and had "put up" at such an opportune moment that they came out in good shape after all, and as soon as the old man found that Lane loved his daughter he insisted on her accepting him. The information about Lane's coming to the rescue with money he had heard from Mr. Vincent himself,—as indeed he had. One evening when they were for the moment alone, in a burst of confidence to the man whom he believed to be a devoted friend of his prospective son-in-law, Vincent had told the silent officer the story of that perilous crisis and of Lane's prompt and generous loan,—but not as Noel told it to Mrs. Riggs.

"Do not distress yourself, my darling one," wrote Lane to his *fiancée*, "because your letters are a little less frequent just now. I know how occupied you must be with preparation, and how anxious you are about the dear old father. Next week you will be in the mountains; and then, as you say, people will give you time to write, and then, too, I shall be happy in your regaining health and spirits. The papers tell me how intense has been the heat: it almost equals ours here in one way, and is much worse in being moist and muggy. There is a pros-

pect of my going on a two weeks' scout with my whole troop early in the month; but your letters will reach me safely."

Why was it that she should experience a feeling almost of relief in reading that he was going to be absent from the garrison awhile,—going out on a two weeks' scout?

She had sent him, as she promised, a lovely cabinet photograph of herself that had been taken expressly for him. It came to the old frontier fort just as the men were marching up from evening stables, and the messenger, distributing the mail about the post, handed the packet to the captain as he stood with a little knot of comrades on the walk. There was instant demand that he should open it and show the picture to them, but, blushing like a girl, he broke away and hid himself in his room; and then, when sure of being uninterrupted, he took it to the window and feasted his eyes upon the exquisite face and form there portrayed. He kept it from that time in a silken case, which he locked in a bureau drawer whenever he left the house, but in the evenings, or when writing at his desk, he brought it forth to light again and set it where every moment he could look upon and almost worship it.

And then came her letters announcing their safe arrival at Deer Park:

"Our journey was most trying, for the heat was intolerable until we got well up among the mountains. Papa came; but I know he is simply fretting his heart out with anxiety to get back to the office. Mr. Clark only returned from his vacation the day we started. Gordon Noel came down to the train to see us off, and brought mother a basket of such luscious fruit. He says that he has no home to go to, now that we are gone. Indeed, he has been very thoughtful and kind, and I don't think he is quite happy, despite his efforts to be always gay and cheerful. . . .

"Do you really mean that you will be gone a fortnight? How I shall miss your dear letters, Fred! And now indeed I will try to write regularly. There's no one here I care anything about, though the hotel seems very full, and there is much dancing and gayety. You say my letters will reach you; but I wonder how."

Lane read this with a sigh of relief. He had persuaded himself that it was because he dreaded the effect of the long-continued hot weather upon her that he so desired her to get to the mountains. Any other thought would have been disloyalty to his queen. He wished—just a little bit—that she had not written of him as Gordon Noel: he much preferred that she should call him Captain. She would not write so fully and frankly of him if he were anything but friendly, he argued, and she would not tolerate his visits on any other grounds. Yet she did not tell him that they had walked up and down the platform together for ten minutes before the train started, and that when it was time to part he had bent down and said, almost in a whisper,—

"Do you want to send a message for me to Fred Lane in your next letter?"

"I will do so, if you wish," she murmured; but her eyes fell before the gaze in his, and the hot blood rushed to her face.

"Tell him there's no man in all the regiment I so long to see, and no man in all the world—I so envy."

Probably conscience smote her, for during the week that followed five letters came,—five letters in seven days! His heart went wild with delight over their tenderness. The last was written Saturday, and then none came for three days; and when the fourth day came and brought the longed-for missive it was a disappointment, somehow.

"Papa left us to go back to the office last night," she wrote. "He could stand it no longer. I fear it did him little good here. The Witherses came on Saturday, and that strange girl, Miss Marshall, is with them. She always impresses me with the idea that she is striving to read my thoughts. She speaks so admiringly of you, and says you were 'so courteous' to her the night you dined at the Witherses'; and I do not remember your ever saying anything about her to me. You see, sir, I am much more communicative about my friends.

"We had such a delightful surprise Saturday night. Who should appear in the hop-room but Gordon Noel? He stayed until the midnight train Sunday; and I really was very glad to see him."

And here Lane stopped reading for a while.

XI.

For some reason or other, the scout which Lane's company had been ordered to hold itself in readiness to make was postponed, no further orders coming from Department head-quarters which required sending any troops into the mountains west of Fort Graham. The captain, far from being disappointed, seemed strangely relieved that he was not required to take his troop into the field at that particular moment. "Something had happened," said Mrs. Breese, who was a keen observer, "to change the spirit of his dream within the last few days." His face lacked the radiant and joyous look that it had had ever since he came back from the East. "Is he getting an inkling of the stories that are in circulation?" was the natural inquiry. "Is he beginning to learn that others were before him in that fair charmer's regard?" Still, no one could question him. There was something about him, with all his frankness and kindliness, that held people aloof from anything like confidence. He never had a confidant of either sex; and this was something that rendered him at one time somewhat unpopular among the women. Younger officers almost always, as a rule, had chosen some one of the married ladies of the regiment as a repositary of their cares and anxieties, their hopes and fears; but Lane had never indulged in any such luxury, and all the better for him was it. Now it was noticed with what eagerness and anxiety he watched for the coming of the mail. It was also observed that during the two weeks that followed only four letters were received in her, by this time, well-known superscription. Lane, of course, reading the contents, could readily account for the scarcity. Her letters were full of descriptions of dances and picnics and riding-parties to the neighboring mountains. They had met scores of pleasant people, and had become acquainted with a

large circle from all parts of the country. They danced every evening regularly in the hop-room, and were so thoroughly acquainted, and so accustomed to one another's moods and fancies, that hardly an hour passed in which they were not occupied in some pleasant recreation. Lawn-tennis had always been a favorite game of hers, and her mother was glad, she said, to see her picking it up again with such alacrity. The open air was doing her good: her color was returning; the languor and weakness which had oppressed her when she first arrived after the long hot spell at home had disappeared entirely. But with returning health came all the longing for out-door active occupation, and, instead of having, as she had planned, hours in which to write to him, almost all her time now was taken up in joyous sports, in horse-back-rides, in long drives over the mountain-roads and through the beautiful scenery by which they were surrounded. "And so," she said, "Fred, dear, in regaining health and color, I fear, your Mabel has very sadly neglected you."

His reply to her letter telling him of Mr. Noel's unexpected appearance at the Park was rather a difficult one for him to write. It was dawning upon him that the attentions of his regimental comrade to his *fiancée* were not as entirely platonic as they might be. Desire to show all courtesy and kindliness to the lady-love of another officer was all very well in its way, but it did not necessitate daily calls when at home, and far less did it warrant his leaving his station without permission—running the risk of a reprimand, or even possible court-martial—and taking a long journey, being absent from his post all Saturday and certainly not returning there before the afternoon of Monday. If this were known at the head-quarters of the recruiting service, Lieutenant Noel in all probability would be rapped severely over the knuckles, if nothing worse. Lane could not, and would not, for an instant blame his *fiancée*, but he gently pointed out to her that Mr. Noel ran great risks in making such a journey, and that it would be well on that account to discourage similar expeditions in the future. To this she made no direct reply; but that she observed his caution is quite possible. At all events, no further mention of visits on the part of Mr. Noel appeared in any of the letters which reached him before the orders for the scout actually did arrive; but that was not until near the very end of the month. It was just about the 28th of August when rumors came of turbulence and threatened outbreak among the Indians at the Chiricahua Reservation. Troops were already marching thither from the stations in Arizona, and Captain Lane was ordered to cross the range and scout on the east side of the reservation, in order to drive back any renegades who might be tempted to "make a break." Just one day before the start he was surprised at receiving a letter from Mrs. Vincent. She spoke gladly of Mabel's improved health and appearance; she spoke hopefully of Mr. Vincent, whose letters, she said, were more cheerful than they had been, and who had been able to come up and spend two Sundays with them. Mabel had doubtless told him of Mr. Noel's visit, and how glad they were just then to see any face so pleasant and familiar. And now she wished to remind him of their contract before

his leaving for the frontier. He doubtless remembered that she had promised that in the near future she would give him the reasons why it seemed best to her that the engagement should not be announced. It would take a pretty long letter to tell all the reasons why, so she would not venture upon that at the moment; but the necessity no longer existed, and if he so desired she would gladly have it now made known to his relatives, as she would now proceed to announce it to Mabel's.

Lane was greatly rejoiced at this. He had been a trifle uneasy and despondent of late, yet scarcely knew why. Her letters were not all he had hoped they would be by this time; but then he did not know but that it was all natural and right; he had never had love-letters before,—had never seen them,—and his ideas of what a woman's letters to her betrothed should be were somewhat vague and undefined. However, there was no one in the garrison to whom he specially cared to formally announce his engagement. People had ceased of late making remarks or inquiries, as nothing had been successful in extracting information from him in the past. Giving directions that his mail should be forwarded once a week, or twice a week if possible, to the railway-station nearest the Chiricahua Mountains, where he could get it by sending couriers once in a while, provided there was no danger in doing so, Lane marched away one evening on what proved to be an absence of an entire month. He never again saw Fort Graham until the end of September, and then only long enough to enable him to change from his scouting-rig into travelling costume, to throw a few clothes into a trunk, and to drive to the railway-station as fast as the ambulance could carry him, in order to catch the first express-train going East.

Nothing of very great importance had occurred on the scout. A few renegades managed to escape eastward from the reservation and to take to the mountains, through which Lane's command was then scouting; and to him and to his troop was intrusted the duty of capturing and bringing them back to the reservation. This took him many a long mile south of the railway. It was three weeks and more before he made his way to the reservation with his prisoners. There he found a small package of letters which had been forwarded direct from Graham, where they evidently knew that he would go into the Agency before reaching the railway, where his other letters were probably awaiting him. Among those which he received was one from Mr. Vincent. Briefly, it said to him, "If a possible thing, come to us as soon as you can obtain leave of absence. There are matters which excite my greatest apprehension, and I feel that I must see you. My health, I regret to say, is failing me rapidly. Come, if you can." Another was from Mrs. Vincent: she spoke with great anxiety of Mr. Vincent's waning health; said very little of Mabel, nothing whatever of Mr. Noel. She told him that the engagement had been formally announced to all their relatives, and that letters of congratulation had been showered on Mabel from all sides,—although there was some little surprise expressed that she should marry an army officer. "She, herself, has not been well at all, and I really believe that a visit from

you would do much to restore her health and spirits. She has been unlike herself ever since we came back from the mountains."

In this same package of letters were two from Mabel. These he read with infinite yearning in his heart, and they only served to increase the wordless anxiety and the intolerable sense of something lacking which he had first felt after the letter that announced Gordon Noel's visit to Deer Park. One more letter there was: this he opened, saw that it was type-written and had no signature, indignantly tore it into fragments, and tossed them to the wind.

The commanding general of the Department—an old and kind friend of Lane's—was then looking over affairs for himself, at the reservation. Lane obtained a few moments' conversation with him, briefly stated his needs, and showed him Mr. Vincent's letter. The instant the general saw the signature he looked up, startled, and then arose from his seat, put his hand on the captain's shoulder, and drew him to one side.

"My dear boy," he said, "there is later news than this. It is dated September 14, you see. Have you heard nothing more?"

"Nothing, general. What has happened?" answered Lane, his voice trembling and his bronzed face rapidly paling. "Am I—am I too late?"

"I fear so, Lane. Had Mr. Vincent a partner named Clark?"

"Yes, sir,—his junior partner."

"Clark defaulted, embezzled, hypothecated securities and heaven knows what all, blew out his brains in his private office, and Mr. Vincent stumbled over the body an hour afterwards, was prostrated by the shock, and died of heart-failure three days later. The papers were full of the tragedy for nearly a week; but there are none to be had here, I'm afraid. Now you will want to start at once. Never mind your troop. Just tell your lieutenant to report here to Captain Bright for orders, and I'll have them sent back to Graham by easy marches."

Late at night Lane reached the railway, only to find his train five hours behind. He telegraphed to Mabel that he would come to her as fast as train could bring him,—that the sad news had only just reached him. He strode for hours up and down the little platform under the glittering stars, yearning to reach her, to comfort and console her in this bitter sorrow. Time and again he turned over in mind the few particulars which he had obtained from the Department commander. They were all too brief, but pointed conclusively to one fact,—that Clark had been encouraged by the success of June to plunge still more deeply, in the hope of retrieving the losses of the past two years. Luckily for Vincent, he had used his June winnings in lifting the mortgage from his homestead and in taking up any of his outstanding paper, and so had little wherewith to supply his confident partner; but Lane wondered if the kindly old man had any idea that up to the end of August, at least, Clark had not sent to him, as directed, "the draft for the entire amount" to which referred the first letter Mr. Vincent had ever written him.

It was daybreak when the train came. It was noon when he sprang from the cars at Graham Station and into the ambulance sent to meet

him in response to his telegraphic request. Were there any letters? he eagerly asked. None now. A small package had been forwarded to the reservation last night, and must have passed him on the way. Others had been waiting for him at the mountain-station until he was reported by wire as arriving with his prisoners at the Agency. Everything then had been sent thither, and there would be no getting them before starting. At Graham the telegraph operator showed him the duplicates of the telegrams that had come for him in his absence,—only two. One announced Mr. Clark's suicide and Vincent's prostration and danger; the other, two days later, briefly read, "Mr. Vincent died this morning. Mrs. Vincent and Mabel fairly well."

Both were signed "Gordon Noel," and a jealous pang shot through the poor fellow's heart as he realized that in all their bereavement and grief it was Noel's privilege to be with them and to be of use to them, while he, her affianced husband, was far beyond hail. He was ashamed of his own thoughts an instant after, and bitterly upbraided himself that he was not thankful that they could have had so attentive and thoughtful an aid as Noel well knew how to be. Yet—why was not Reginald sufficient?

He had torn into fragments the anonymous sheet that had met him at the reservation, and yet its words were gnawing at his heartstrings now, and he could not crush them down:

"Why was your engagement denied? Because she still cared for Will Rossiter and hoped he might come back to her after all.

"Why did Gordon Noel stay at the other hotel the second and third times he spent Sunday at Deer Park? Because she wished to hide from her mother, as she did from you, that he came at all.

"Why does she meet him on the street instead of at home? Because her father interposed in your behalf; but all the same you are being betrayed."

These words—or others exactly of their import, were what met his startled eyes at Chiricahua, but the instant he noted that these carefully type-written sentences were followed by no signature at all,—not even the oft-abused "A Friend,"—indignation and wrath followed close on the heels of his amaze, and in utter contempt he had destroyed the cowardly sheet; but he could not so easily conquer the poison thus injected in his veins. All the long, long journey to the East they haunted him, dancing before his eyes, sleeping or waking, and it was with haggard face and wearied frame that he reached the Queen City, and, taking a cab, drove at once to her home.

It was a lovely evening in early October. The sun had been shining brilliantly all day long, and almost everywhere doors and windows were open to woo the cool air now gently stirring. The cab stopped before the well-remembered steps, and Lane hastened to the broad door-way. No need to ring: the portals stood invitingly open. The gas burned brightly in the hall and in the sitting-room to the left. He entered unhesitatingly, and stood all alone in the room where he had spent so many happy hours listening to the music of her voice, watching the play and animation in her lovely face. He caught a glimpse of his own, gaunt, haggard, hollow-eyed, in the mirror over

the old-fashioned mantel. What was he, that he should have won a creature so radiant, so exquisite, as the girl who had made these silent rooms a heaven to him? There was the heavy portière that shut off the little passage to the library. His foot-fall made no sound in the deep, rich carpeting. It was there she welcomed him that wonderful Friday afternoon,—that day that was the turning-point, the climax, of his life. Hark! was that her voice, low, sweet, tremulous, in there now? Hush! Was that a sob?—a woman's suppressed weeping? Quickly he stepped forward, and in an instant had thrust aside the second portière; but he halted short at the threshold, petrified by the scene before him.

Mabel Vincent, clasped in Gordon Noel's embrace, her arms about his neck, gazing up into his face with almost worship in her weeping eyes, raised her lips to meet the passionate kiss of his. "My darling," he murmured, "what can you fear? Have you not given *me* the right to protect you?" And the handsome head was tossed proudly back and for one little minute was indeed heroic. Then, with instantaneous change, every drop of blood fled from his face, leaving it ashen, death-like.

"*Gordon!*" she cried, "what is it? Are you ill?"

Then, following the glance of his staring eyes, she turned, and saw, and swooned away.

XII.

A dreary winter was that of 188– at old Fort Graham. Captain Breese became major of the —th, and his troop was ordered to exchange with K, which had been so long at head-quarters, and this brought old Jim Rawlins up to take command of the little cavalry battalion at "the oasis." There were many of the officers—Rawlins among them—who thought that after his success with "the Devil's Own," as D Troop had been called, Lane was entitled to enjoy the position of battalion commander; but Mrs. Riggs had promptly asserted her belief that he was not in position to enjoy anything. He had come back to the post late in the fall, looking some years older and graver; he had been very ill at Jefferson Barracks, said letters from that point, while waiting to take out a party of recruits to the regiment; he had resumed duty without a word to anybody of the matters that had so suddenly called him East, but there was no need of telling: they knew all about it; at least they said and thought they did. Mrs. Riggs had had such complete accounts from Noel, and had received such a sweet letter from Miss Vincent in reply to the one she had written congratulating her upon her engagement to *her* (Mrs. Riggs's) "*favorite among all the officers*,—and the colonel's, too." "She was so sorry—so painfully distressed—about Captain Lane," said Mrs. Riggs. "She never really cared for him. It was gratitude and propinquity, and pleasure in his attentions, that she mistook for love; but she never knew what love was until she met Gordon. They were to be married early in the spring, and would take only a brief tour, for he had to be at his station. She dreaded coming to the regiment, though she would follow Gordon to the end of the world if he said so, for she knew there were people

who would blame her for breaking with Captain Lane as she had to; but she knew long before she did so that they could never be happy together. She had written to him, telling him all, long before he came East and they had that dreadful scene in which Mr. Noel had behaved with such perfect self-command and such excessive consideration for Captain Lane's feelings. Of course, as Gordon said, all possibility of reconciliation or future friendship between them was at an end unless Captain Lane humbly apologized. She had been mercifully spared hearing it; for the fearful expression of his face when they discovered him listening at the portière had caused her to faint away, and she only came to, Gordon said, in time to prevent his pitching him out of the window, so utterly was he tried. She was so thankful to have in Mrs. Riggs a friend who would not see Gordon wronged, and who could be counted on to deny any stories that poor Captain Lane in his disappointment might put in circulation."

But Lane never mentioned the subject. As for the letters to which she referred, they all followed him East in one bundle and were sent to her unopened; and she knew when she wrote to Mrs. Riggs that, though she might have "told him all," as she said, he never knew a word of it until his eyes and ears revealed the truth that wretched night in the library where his brief, sweet love-dream began and ended.

There were other matters wherein Mr. Noel himself was consulting Mrs. Riggs. He was now senior first lieutenant. Any accident of service might make him a captain, and then, if precedent were followed, "he might be ordered to join at once. Ordinarily, as she well knew, nothing would give him greater joy; but now—solely on Mabel's account—he hesitated. A friend at the War Department had said that, if Colonel Riggs would approve, a six months' leave to visit Europe, for the purpose of prosecuting his professional studies, might be obtained. Would she kindly, etc., etc."

There was no one to write or speak for Lane: only one side of the story was being told, and, though the men had had little else than contempt for Noel, they were of small account in moulding garrison opinions as compared with two or three determined women.

But no one saw the sorrowful, almost heart-broken, letter written by Mrs. Vincent to Lane. She had no words in which to speak of Mabel's conduct. They had both been deceived; and yet she implored him for forgiveness for her child. The world was all changed now. Their home remained to them, and her own little fortune, together with the wreck of Mr. Vincent's, but Regy had to go out into the world and seek to earn what he could. He had no idea of business. There was no one to step in and build up the old firm, and the executors had advised that everything be closed out. Mr. Clark's affairs had been left in lamentable confusion, but luckily he had nothing else to leave,—nothing, that is, but confusion and creditors. People were constantly importuning her for payment of his liabilities, claiming that they were contracted by the firm. Her lawyers absolutely forbade her listening to such demands. If she paid one-fourth of them she would have nothing left. Lane thought of his sacrificed Cheyenne property and the little fortune he had so freely offered up to save to the girl he loved

the home in which she had been reared. The very roof under which the girl had plighted her troth to him and then dishonored it for Noel—under which, day after day, she was now receiving, welcoming, caressing him—was practically rescued for her and her mother by the money of the man she had cast aside.

The wedding-cards came in April. It was to be a quiet affair, because of the death of Mr. Vincent within the year. Lane read the announcement in the *Army and Navy Journal*, and sat for a while, the paper dropping to the floor and his head upon his hands. Elsewhere in its columns he found a full account, written evidently by some one thoroughly well acquainted with all the parties, except perhaps the gallant groom.

When Lane's servant tiptoed in at reveille the next morning to prepare the bath and black the boots, he was surprised to find that officer sitting at his desk with his head pillowed in his arms. He had not been to bed, and did not know that reveille had sounded. Was he ill? Did he need the doctor? No. He had to sit up late over some letters and papers, and had finally fallen asleep there. All the same Dr. Gowen, happening into the hospital while Lane was visiting one of his men after sick-call, stopped, and keenly examined his face.

"I want you to go right to your quarters and stay there, Lane, for you've got a fever, and, I believe, mountain fever," were his immediate orders. "I'll be with you in a moment." It was only the beginning of what proved to be a trying illness of several weeks' duration. When Lane was able to sit up again, it was the recommendation of the post-surgeon and of his regimental commander that he be sent East on sick-leave for at least three months. And the first week of June found him at West Point: he had many old and warm friends there, and their companionship and cordiality cheered him greatly. One night, strolling back from parade to the broad piazza of the hotel, he saw the stage drive up from the landing and a number of visitors scurry up the steps in haste to escape the prying eyes of the older arrivals, who invariably thronged the south piazza at such times and curiously inspected the travel-stained and cinder-spotted faces of those whose ill luck it was to have to run that social gauntlet. There was something familiar in the face of a young lady following a portly matron into the hall, and when a moment later he came upon the massive frame of Mr. Amos Withers, registering himself, his wife, daughters, and Miss Marshall, of the Queen City, Lane knew at once that it was his friend of the dismal dinner of nearly a year ago. Later that evening he met her in the hall, and was surprised at the prompt and pleasant recognition which she gave him. It was not long before they were on the north piazza, watching that peerless view up the Hudson, and, finding that she had never been there before and was enthusiastic in her admiration of the scenery, Lane took pleasure in pointing out to her the various objects of interest that could be seen through the brilliant sheen of moonlight. And so, having made himself at once useful and entertaining, he finally went to his bed with a sensation of having passed rather a brighter evening than he had known in a long, long time.

On the following day Miss Marshall was in the hall, reading,

when he came out from breakfast. She was waiting, she said, for Mrs. Withers to come down. The nurse was dressing the children.

"I want to ask you something, Captain Lane. I saw Mrs. Vincent just before I left home, and had a little talk with her. She has always been very kind to me. Did you ever receive a letter she wrote to you three or four weeks ago?"

"I never did," said Lane. "Do you think that she did write to me?"

"I know she did. She told me so, and expressed great surprise that you had accorded her no answer. She felt very sure of your friendship, and she was at a loss to understand your silence. Although I had only met you once or twice before, I felt that I knew you so well that you could not refuse to answer a letter from so lovable a woman as she, and I deemed it my duty to let you know what she had told me. I am very glad now that I did so."

"Is she at home?" asked Lane, eagerly.

"She was when I left, but they were expecting to go to the mountains. Mrs. Noel seems to be drooping a little. The weather is very warm there already, as you know, and the doctor has advised that both ladies go up to Deer Park. Mrs. Noel doesn't wish to go, as it takes her so far from her husband; but, as he was able to get there quite frequently when they were there before, I see no reason why he should not be able to join them every week now."

"Was he there frequently when they were there before?" asked Lane, an old, dull pain gnawing at his heart.

"He was there three or four times to my knowledge during our stay, but of course his visits were very brief: he came generally Saturday and went away at midnight Sunday."

"I will go and telegraph to Mrs. Vincent. If need be, I will go and see her; and I thank you very much, Miss Marshall."

That evening he received a despatch from Mrs. Vincent in response to the one sent almost immediately after this conversation. "If possible, come here. I greatly desire to see you. Wire answer." What could it mean?

By the first train on the following morning he left for New York, and was far on his way to the Queen City when sunset came. Arriving there, he went first to the old hotel, and, after changing his dress and removing the stains of travel, for the first time since his memorable visit of October he mounted the broad stone steps and asked to see Mrs. Vincent. She came down almost instantly, and Lane was shocked to see how she had failed since their last meeting. Years seemed to have been added to her age; her hair was gray; the lines in her gentle, patient face had deepened. She entered, holding forth both hands, but when she looked into his eyes her lips quivered and she burst into tears. Lane half led, half supported her to a chair, and, drawing one to her side, spoke soothingly to her. For a few moments she could not speak, and when she did he checked her.

"Oh, you too have aged and suffered! and it is all our doing,—all our doing!" she moaned, as her tears burst forth anew.

"Never mind my crow's-feet and gray hairs, dear lady," he said.

"It is high time I began to show signs of advancing age. Then, too, I am just up from a siege of mountain fever."

"Was that the reason you did not answer?" she presently asked.

"I never got your letter, Mrs. Vincent. When was it mailed?"

"About the 10th of May. I remember it well, because—it was just after Mabel and Captain Noel got back from their tour."

"Pardon me, but did you post it yourself?"

"No. The postman always takes my letters. I leave them on the little table in the vestibule."

"Where any one can see them?"

"Yes; but who would touch my letters?"

Lane did not know, of course. He was only certain that nothing from Mrs. Vincent had reached him during the past six months.

"Captain Lane," she said, at last, "I want you to tell me the truth. Just after Mabel's marriage I heard that a story was in circulation to the effect that it was your money that enabled Mr. Vincent to tide over the crisis in his affairs a year ago. It was even said that you had sold property at a loss to supply him with means; and some people in society are so cruel as to say that Mabel's trousseau was actually purchased with your money, because it had never been repaid. I know that Mr. Vincent often spoke of his obligation and gratitude to you. Tell me truly and frankly, Captain Lane: did you give my husband money? Is this story true?"

"I never gave Mr. Vincent a cent."

"Oh, I am so thankful! We have been the means of bringing such sorrow to you——"

"I beg you, make no reference to that, Mrs. Vincent. Neither your honored husband nor you have I ever thought in the least responsible. And as for this other matter, you have been misinformed."

"What cruel, reckless stories people tell! It hurt me terribly; and then when no answer came to my letter I felt that probably there was something in it, and that you were hiding the truth from me. Mabel heard it too; but she said that Captain Noel investigated it at once and found that it was utterly false. I could not be satisfied until I had your own assurance."

"And now you have it," he said, with a smile that shone on his worn face and beamed about his deep-set eyes like sunshine after April showers. "You are going to be advised now, are you not, and seek change and rest in the mountains?"

"We meant to go this week; but Mrs. Paterson, of Philadelphia, is urging us to spend the summer with her at the sea-shore, where she has a roomy cottage. She is a cousin of Captain Noel's, and was an intimate friend of Mabel's at school. That was where my daughter first heard of him. Oh, I wish—I wish——"

And here once more Mrs. Vincent's tears poured forth, and it was some time before she could control herself.

At last the captain felt that he must go. It was now his purpose to leave town as soon as he could attend to one or two matters of business.

"Shall I not see you again?" she asked, as he rose to take his leave.

"I fear not," he answered. "There is nothing to require more

than an hour or two of attention here, and then I shall seek a cooler spot for a few weeks' rest, then back to the regiment."

"But we—that is, I heard you had three months' sick-leave."

"Very true; but I only need one, and I am best with my troop."

"Tell me," she asked: "is it true that there is trouble brewing again among the Indians,—at San Carlos, isn't it?"

"There seems to be bad blood among them, and no doubt disaffection; but if sufficient troops are sent to the Agency and to scout around the reservation they can be held in check."

"But I have been told that you have too small a force to watch them. I wish you were not going back; but it is like you, Captain Lane."

And so they parted. He saw and heard and asked nothing of his whilom *fiancée*. He did not wish to see her husband. He meant to have left town that very evening, after brief consultation with a real-estate agent whom he had had occasion to employ in his service; but even as he was stowing his travelling-"kit" in a roomy leather bag there came a knock at his door and there entered a man in plain civilian dress, who motioned the bell-boy to clear out, and then held forth a photograph:

"Captain Lane, is that your man Taintor?"

"That is certainly like the man," was Lane's answer, after careful inspection. "Have you got him?"

"No, sir. We had him, and took Captain Noel to see him, and the captain said there was some mistake. He wears his hair and beard different now; but we know where he is,—at least, where he was up to yesterday. He left his lodgings at noon, and took a bag with him, as though he meant to be away a few days. He does copying and type-writing, and manages to get along and support a good-looking young woman who passes as his wife. *That's* what we think brought him back here last winter."

"Why didn't you take some of the recruiting-party to see him? They could identify him."

"All the old men that were with you are gone, sir. It's a new lot entirely. They said the sergeant couldn't get along with the captain at all, and they were all sent away."

"Where's the woman who kept the lodging-house for the party?"

"She's gone too, sir. They moved away last winter because Captain Noel gave the contract to another party in a different part of the town. We let the thing slide for quite a while; but when the Chief heard that you had arrived in town he thought he'd shadow the fellow until you could see him, but he had skipped. Was there any way he could have heard you were coming?"

"No. I telegraphed from West Point to Mrs. Vincent. She was the only one who knew."

"Beg pardon, sir, but isn't that Captain Noel's mother-in-law? The captain lives there, I think."

Lane turned sharply and studied the man's face. A question was at his very tongue's end,—"You do not suppose *he* could have given warning?"—but he stifled it, his lips compressing tight.

"If you think he has gone because of my coming, I will leave on the late train, as I purposed, and you can wire to me when he returns. Then keep him shadowed until I get here."

And with this understanding they parted, Lane going at once to a cool resort on one of the great lakes. Four days later came the despatch he looked for, and, accompanied by two detectives, Lane knocked at the indicated door-way one bright, sunshiny afternoon within forty-eight hours thereafter.

A comely young woman opened the door just a few inches and inquired what was wanted. "Mr. Graves was not at home." He certainly would not have been in a minute more, for a man swung out of the third-story window, and, going hand by hand down the convenient lightning-rod, dropped into the arms of a waiting officer, and that night the forger and deserter spent behind the bars in the Central Station. The identification was complete.

Lane was to appear and make formal charge against him the following morning. Going down to an early breakfast, he picked up one of the great dailies at the news-stand, and, after taking his seat at table and ordering a light repast, he opened the still moist sheet. The first glance at the head-lines was enough to start him to his feet. "Indian Outbreak." "The Apaches on the War-Path." "Murder of Agent Curtis at San Carlos." "Massacre of a Stage-Load of Passengers." "Captain Rawlins, Eleventh Cavalry, a victim." "Horrible Atrocities." "Troops in Pursuit."

It was the old, old story briefly told. Warnings disregarded; official reports of the neighboring troop-commanders pooh-poohed and pigeon-holed by functionaries of the Indian Bureau; a sudden, startling rush of one body upon the agent and his helpless family; a simultaneous dash from the other end of the reservation upon the scattered ranches in the valley; a stage-coach ambushed; a valued old soldier butchered in cold blood. There was no more thought of breakfast for Lane. He hurried to the telegraph-office, thence to the police-station, thence to an attorney whom he was advised to employ, and by noon he was whirling westward. "No laggard he" when the war-cry rang along the blazing border.

XIII.

The *Morning Chronicle*, a most valuable sheet in its way, in its Sunday edition contained the following interesting item:

"No event in social circles has eclipsed of late the banquet given at the club last night in honor of Captain Gordon Noel, of the Eleventh Cavalry, on the eve of his departure to take command of his troop, now hastening to the scene of Indian hostilities in Arizona. As is well known to our citizens, the news of the murderous outbreak at the reservation was no sooner received than this gallant officer applied instantly to be relieved from his present duties in our midst and ordered to join his comrades in the field, that he might share with them the perils of this savage warfare.

"Covers were laid for forty. The table was decorated with flowers and glistened with plate and crystal. The most conspicuous device was

the crossed sabres of the cavalry, with the number 11 and the letter K, that being the designation of the captain's company. His honor Mayor Jenness presided, and the Hon. Amos Withers faced him at the other end of the banquet-board. The speech of the evening was made by Mayor Jenness in toasting 'our gallant guest,' which was drunk standing and with all honors. We have room only for a brief summary of his remarks. Alluding to the previous distinguished services of the captain, he said that 'In every Territory of our broad West his sabre has flashed in the defence of the weak against the strong, the poor settler against the powerful and numerous savage tribes too often backed by official influence at Washington. And now, while cheeks were blanching and hearts were still stricken by the dread news of the butcheries and rapine which marked the Indians' flight, when others shrank from such perilous work, where was the man who could suppress the fervent admiration with which he heard that there was one soldier who lost no time in demanding relief from duty here, that he might speed to the head of the gallant fellows already in the field, who had followed him in many a stirring charge and through all "the current of many a heady fight;" whose hearts would leap for joy at sight of their beloved leader's face,—the man who never yet had failed them, the man who never yet had faltered in his duty, the man whose sword was never drawn without reason, never sheathed without honor,—our soldier guest, Captain Gordon Noel?'

"Much affected, it was some minutes before the captain could respond. The modesty of the true soldier restrained his eloquence. 'He knew not how to thank them for this most flattering testimony of their confidence and regard; he far from deserved the lavish praise of their honored chairman. If in the past he had succeeded in winning their esteem, all the more would he try to merit it now. No soldier could remain in security when such desperate deeds called his comrades to the fray; and as he had ever shared their dangers in the old days, so must he share them now. His heart, his home, his bride, to part from whom was bitter trial, he left with them to guard and cherish. Duty called him to the front, and with to-morrow's sun he would be on his way. But, if it pleased God to bear him safely through, he would return to them, to greet and grasp each friendly hand again, and meantime to prove himself worthy the high honor they had done him.'

"There was hardly a dry eye at the table when the gallant soldier finished his few remarks and then took his seat.

"Besides winning the heart and hand of one of the loveliest of the Queen City's daughters, the captain has made hosts of friends in our midst, and we predict that when the records of the campaign are written no name will shine with brighter lustre than that of Gordon Noel."

This doubtless was delightful reading to Noel and to Noel's relatives. Doubtless, too, it was some comfort to poor Mabel as she lay pale, anxious, sore at heart on the following day, while her husband and lover—as he undoubtedly was—sped westward with the fast express. But there was a great deal about the *Chronicle's* account that would have elicited something more than a broad grin from officers who knew Noel well.

An entire week had elapsed from the time that the first tidings were received to the moment when he finally and most reluctantly left the Queen City. The first intimation was enough to start Captain Lane, despite the fact that his health was far from restored and that he was yet by no means strong. He felt confident that the Indians would be joined by some of the Chiricahuas, and that the campaign would be fierce and stubborn. Telegraphing to the regimental adjutant and the general commanding the department that he intended to start at once, and asking to be notified *en route* where he could most speedily join the troop, he was on his way within six hours.

That very night, although no mention was made of this in the *Chronicle* account, Captain Noel received a despatch from the Adjutant-General's Office at Washington briefly to this effect: "You become Captain of K Company, *vice* Rawlins, murdered by Apaches. Hold yourself in readiness to turn over the rendezvous and join your regiment without delay." No news could have been more unwelcome. Despite his many faults, there was no question that Gordon Noel was very much in love with his wife; but he never had been in love with the active part of his profession. That night he telegraphed to relatives who had stood by him in the past, and wrote urgent and pleading letters informing them that his wife's health was in so delicate a state that if he were compelled at this moment to leave her and to go upon perilous duty in the Apache country there was no telling what might be the effect upon her. If a possible thing, he urged that there should be a delay of a fortnight. He calculated that by that time the Indians would either be safe across the Mexican border or whipped back to the reservation; then he could go out and join with a flourish of trumpets and no possible danger. But a new king reigned in the War Department, who knew Joseph rather than knew him not. In some way the honorable Secretary had become acquainted with the previous history of Captain Noel's campaign services, and, though the influential gentlemen referred to made prompt and eloquent appeal, they were met by courteous but positive denial. "Every man who was worth his salt," said the Secretary, "should be with his regiment now." An officer was designated to proceed at once to the Queen City and take over Noel's rendezvous and property, and peremptory orders were sent to him to start without delay and to notify the department by telegraph of the date of his departure,—a most unusual and stringent proceeding. This correspondence Noel never mentioned to anybody at the time, and it was known only to the official records for some time afterwards. As soon as he found that go he must, he dictated to his clerk a letter in which, gallant soldier that he was, he informed the Adjutant-General that the news from Arizona had now convinced him that an outbreak of alarming dimensions had taken place, and he begged that he might be relieved as at his own request and permitted to join his comrades in the field. To this no reply was sent, as the order directing him to proceed had already been issued. Perhaps a grim smile played about the moustached lips of that functionary when he read this spirited epistle.

Noel left the Queen City a hero in the eyes of the populace. He

was just six days behind Lane, of whose movements the Queen City had no information whatever.

And now came an odd piece of luck,—a slip in the fortunes of war. The cavalry stationed in Arizona were so far from the reservation at the time that they had long and difficult marches to make. Only two or three troops that happened to be along the line of the railway reached the mountains neighboring San Carlos in time to quickly take the trail of the hostiles. Except the one little troop of cavalry on duty at the reservation, none of the horsemen in Arizona had as yet come in actual conflict with the renegades, and, oddly enough, it was the Eleventh that first met and struck them. Old Riggs himself had not taken the field, but the battalion from head-quarters had been whirled westward along the railway and actually reached the pass through the Chiricahua Range before the Indians. Expecting just such a possibility, these wary campaigners had their scouts far in advance of the main body, and prompt warning was given, so that only the rear-guard of the Indians was reached by the eager cavalrymen; the bulk of the Apaches turned eastward and swept down like ravening wolves upon the defenceless settlers in the San Simon Valley, burning, murdering, pillaging as they went, full fifty miles a day, while their pursuers trailed helplessly behind. When they had succeeded in crossing the railway most of their number were mounted on fresh horses, and the section-hands, who saw them from afar off, telegraphed from the nearest station that they had with them six or eight women and children whose husbands and fathers doubtless lay weltering in their blood along the route. Full seven days now had they been dodging through the mountains and swooping down upon the ranchmen, and so skilfully had they eluded their pursuers and defeated their combinations that now they had a commanding lead and actually nothing between them and the Mexican frontier,—nothing in Arizona, that is to say. But look just across the border. There, spurring steadily southwestward until halted for the night in San Simon Pass, comes a little troop of cavalry, not more than thirty-five in number. All day long since earliest dawn had they ridden across the burning sands of a desert region; lips, nostrils, eyelids smarting with alkali-dust, throats parched with thirst, temples throbbing with the intense heat; several men and horses used up and left behind were now slowly plodding back towards the railway. Look at the letter one of those leaders wears upon his worn old scouting-hat, —D. Yes, it is the "Devil's own D's," and Lane is at their head.

At the moment of the outbreak, both companies from Graham, K and D, or strong detachments from both, were scouting through the country,—one through the northern Peloncillo Range, the other far up among the head-waters of the Gila. Not a word did they hear of the trouble until it was several days old; then D Troop was amazed by the sudden appearance of their captain in their midst,—Lane, whom they supposed to be on sick-leave far in the distant East. It was then for the first time they learned how their comrades of K Troop had lost their popular old commander, and that the great outbreak had occurred at San Carlos. Stopping only long enough to cram their pouches with ammunition and to draw more rations, the troop hastened away towards

the railroad by way of Graham, and at the station, just at dawn, Lane sent a brief despatch to the commanding general saying that he was pushing with all speed to head the Indians off *via* San Simon Pass. He had then forty-five men and horses, in fair condition. K Troop would reach Graham that evening, and he urged that they be sent at once to reinforce him. This despatch "the Chief" received with an emphatic slap of his thigh and an expression of delight: "Bless that fellow Lane! he is always in the nick of time. I had not hoped for an instant that either D or K would be available, and now look," he said to his aide-de-camp, "he has started for San Simon Pass, and will probably throw himself across their front. Only I wish he had more men."

"Shall I wire to Graham to have K rush after him, sir?"

"Yes. Order them to start the instant they can refit, and not to take more than an hour in doing that. They have been having easy work on their scout,—probably taking it leisurely all the time; they ought to be in first-rate trim. D, on the contrary, has been making long and rapid marches to get down from the Upper Gila. Where was K at last accounts?"

"Couriers had gone to the Upper Peloncillo for them several days ago, and, as Lane says, they are expected at Graham this evening. Lane, himself, rode after his own men two hours after he got to the post from the East, and Noel, who is K's new captain, is due at Graham Station to-night."

"Then send him orders to lead his troop instantly, follow and support Lane. Tell him not to lose a moment on the way. Everything may depend upon his promptness and zeal."

And so it happened that when Captain Noel stepped from the train that afternoon at the old station the telegraph messenger came forward to meet him, touching his cap and saying, "This despatch has been awaiting you, sir, since eleven o'clock this morning. I have just had a despatch from the post, and K Troop got in two hours ago and is already starting. Lieutenant Mason says an orderly is coming ahead with a horse and the captain's field-kit. Shall I wire for anything else?"

Noel opened the despatch which had been handed him, and read it with an expression that plainly indicated perturbation, if not dismay. He had not been in saddle for an entire year.

"Why, I must go out to the post!" he said to the operator. "I am not at all ready to take the field. Let them know that I have arrived, and will come out there without delay. Better have the troop unsaddled and wait for my coming."

"Will the captain pardon me?" said the operator; "the orders from the Department commander that went through this morning were that the troop should not take more than an hour in refitting at the post and should start at once. I thought I could see them coming over the divide just as the whistle blew."

The captain's face gave no sign of enthusiasm as he received this news. He was still pondering over the contents of his despatch from the commanding general,—its tone was so like that of his order from

the War Department,—so utterly unlike what his admiring circle of relatives and friends would have expected. Stepping into the telegraph-office, he took some blanks and strove to compose a despatch that would convince the general that he was wild with eagerness to ride all night to the support of Lane, and yet that would explain how absolutely necessary it was that he should first go out to the post. But the Fates were against him. Even as he was gnawing the pencil and cudgelling his brains, the operator called out,—

"Here come some of 'em now, sir."

And, looking nervously from the window, Noel saw three horsemen galloping in to the station. Foremost came a lieutenant of infantry, who sprang to the ground and tossed the reins to his orderly the instant he neared the platform. One of the men had a led horse, completely equipped for the field, with blankets, saddle-bags, carbine, canteen, and haversack; and Noel's quick intuition left him no room to believe that the steed was intended for any one but him.

The infantryman came bounding in: "Is this Captain Noel? I am Mr. Renshaw, post-adjutant, sir, and I had hoped to get here in time to meet you on your arrival, but we were all busy getting the troop ready. You've got your orders, sir, haven't you? My God! captain, *can't* you wire to the fort and beg the major to let me go with you? I'll be your slave for a lifetime. I've never had a chance to do a bit of real campaigning yet, and no man could ask a bullier chance than this. Excuse me, sir, I know you want to get right into scouting rig,—Mr. Mason said his 'extras' would fit you exactly,—but if you could take me along—you're bound to get there just in time for the thick of it." And the gallant little fellow looked, all eagerness, into Noel's unresponsive face. What wouldn't the hero of the Queen City Club have given to turn the whole thing over to this ambitious young soldier and let him take his chances of "glory or the grave"!

"Very thoughtful of you all, I'm sure, to think of sending horse and kit here for me, but I really ought to go out to the post. There are things I must attend to. You see, I left the instant I could induce them to relieve me, and there was no time to make preparations."

"But—you can't have heard, captain: your troop will be here in ten minutes. Captain Lane by this time is past Pyramid Mountain, and will strike them early in the morning. There won't be any time to go out to the post: you've got to ride at trot or gallop most of the night as it is——"

"Captain Noel, pardon me, sir," interposed the operator. "The general is in the office at Wilcox Station. He wants to know if you have started from here."

"Tell him the troop isn't here yet. I—I'm waiting for it."

"Yonder comes the troop, sir," called out Mr. Renshaw, who had run to the door. "Now let me help you off with your 'cits.' Bring that canvas bag in here, orderly."

Three minutes brought a message from "the Chief:" "Lose not a moment on the way. Report here by wire the arrival of your troop and the moment you start. Behind time now."

Poor Noel! There was no surgeon to certify that his pallid cheeks

were due to impaired heart-action, no senatorial cousin to beg for staff duty, no Mrs. Riggs to interpose. He had just time to send a despatch to Mabel announcing that he took the field at the head of his troop at once, another (collect) to Amos Withers, Esq., of similar import, and one to the general, saying that at 4.45 they were just on the point of starting, when the troop, fifty strong and in splendid trim, came trotting in, and Mr. Mason grimly saluted his new captain and fell back to the command of the first platoon.

"Noel to the Front!" was the *Chronicle's* head-line on the following morning far away in the Queen City.

XIV.

Not an instant too soon, although he has ridden hard since earliest dawn, has Lane reached the rocky pass. North and south the Peloncillos are shrouded in the gloom of coming night, and all over the arid plain to the eastward darkness has settled down. In previous scouts he has learned the country well, and he knows just where to turn for "tanks" of cool water for horses, mules, and men,—the cavalry order of precedence when creature comforts are to be doled out. He knows just where to conceal his little force in the recesses of the rocks and let them build tiny fires and make their coffee and then get such rest as is possible before the coming day; but there is no rest for him. Taking two veteran soldiers with him, and leaving the troop to the command of his lieutenant, an enthusiastic young soldier only a year out of the cadet gray, the captain rides westward through the gloaming. He must determine at once whether the Indians are coming towards the pass by which the San Simon makes its burst through the range, or whether, having made wide *détour* around the little post at Bowie among the Chiricahua Mountains, they are now heading southward again and taking the shortest line to the border before seeking to regain once more their old trail along the San Bernardino. How often have their war-parties gone to and fro along those rocky banks, unmolested, unpursued!

And now, secure in the belief that they have thrown all the cavalry far to the rear in the "stern-chase" which no Apache dreads, well knowing how easily he can distance his hampered pursuers, the renegades, joined by a gang of the utterly "unreconstructed" Chiricahuas, are taking things easily and making raids on the helpless ranches that lie to the right or left of their line of march. Fortunately for the records, these are few in number; had there been dozens more they would only have served to swell the list of butchered men, of plundered ranches, of burning stacks and corrals, of women and children borne off to be the sport of their leisure hours when once secure in the fastnesses of the Sierra Madres far south of the line. Death could not too soon come to the relief of these poor creatures, and Lane and all his men had been spurred to the utmost effort by the story of the railway-hands that they had plainly seen several women and children bound to the spare animals the renegades drove along across the iron track.

Among the passengers in the pillaged stage-coach were the wife and daughter of an Indian agent, who had only recently come to this arid Territory and knew little of the ways of its indigenous people. Nothing had since been seen or heard of them. Captain Rawlins and two soldiers going up as witnesses before a court-martial at Grant were found hacked almost beyond recognition, and the driver too, who seemed to have crawled out among the rocks to die. Verily the Apaches had good reason to revel in their success! They had hoodwinked the Bureau, dodged the cavalry, plundered right and left until they were rich with spoil, and now, well to the south of the railway, with a choice of either east or west side of the range, their main body and prisoners are halted to rest the animals, while miles to the rear their faithful vedettes keep watch against pursuers, and miles out to the west the most active young warriors are crying havoc at the ranch of Tres Hermanos. It is the red glare of the flame towards the sunset horizon that tells Lane the Apaches cannot be far away. The instant he and his comrades issue from the gorge and peer cautiously to the right and left, not only do they see the blaze across the wide valley, but northward, not more than half a mile away, there rises upon the night-wind a sound that they cannot mistake,—the war-chant of the Chiricahuas.

"Thank God," cries Lane, "we are here ahead of them!"

Half an hour's reconnoissance reveals to him their position. Far up among the boulders of the range, where pursuing horsemen cannot rush upon them in the night, they have made their bivouac, and are having a revel and feast while awaiting the return of the raiders or news from the rear that they must be moving. The range is rugged and precipitous north of the gorge; cavalry cannot penetrate it; but Lane's plan is quickly laid. He will let his men sleep until two o'clock, keeping only three sentries on the lookout, one of them mounted and west of the gorge to give warning should the Indians move during the night. Then, leaving the horses concealed among the rocks south of the stream, with two men to guard them, he will lead his company up the heights and as close as possible to the Apache camp, lie in hiding until it is light enough to distinguish objects, then dash down into their midst, rescue the prisoners in the panic and confusion that he knows will result from the sudden attack, send them back as rapidly as possible, guided by three or four men, to where his horses are corralled, while he and his little band interpose between them and any rally the Apaches may make.

Knowing well that they are armed with magazine rifles and supplied by a paternal Bureau with abundant ammunition, knowing that they outnumber him three to one, knowing that by sunrise the whole tribe will have reassembled and must infallibly detect the pitiful weakness of his own force, it is a desperate chance to take; but it is the only one —absolutely the only one—to save those tortured, agonized women, those terror-stricken little ones, from a fate more awful than words can portray.

By eight or nine in the morning, he argues, K Troop must certainly reach him; he knows them to be fresh and strong, he knows that they have had only short and easy marches and therefore can easily come

ahead all night long and be rounding the Pyramid Spur by daybreak. He knows Mason well, and can count on that young officer's doing his "level best" to support him. Alas! he does not know that Mason is compelled by this time to fall back to second place, and that the last man on whom he can possibly count "in a pinch" is now in command of the looked-for troop.

The night wears on without alarm. Well-nigh exhausted, Lane has thrown himself at the foot of a tree to catch what sleep he may, and he feels as though he had not closed his eyes when Corporal Shea bends over him to say it is two o'clock. Noiselessly the men are aroused; silently they roll out of their blankets, and, obedient to the low-toned "fall in" of the first sergeant, seize their arms and take their place in line. There Lane briefly explains the situation; tells them of the position of the Apache bivouac; details Corporal Riley and four men to search for, secure, and hie away with the prisoners, and orders all the rest to fight like the devil to drive the Apaches helter-skelter into the rocks. "Let not one word be said nor a trigger pulled until we are right among them. Wait for my command, unless we are detected and fired on. If we are, blaze away at once; but never stop your rush: get right in among them. Let Riley and his men make instant search, be sure they leave neither woman nor child behind, and start them back here. The rest of us will fall back slowly, keeping between them and the Apaches all the time. Never let them get near those prisoners. That is the main object of our attack. Once back here with the horses, we can pick out places in the rocks from which we can stand the Apaches off until K Troop comes. Rest assured Lieutenant Mason and his men will be along by eight or nine; and it cannot be that the cavalry now pursuing the Apaches from the north will be more than a few hours behind. Now, do you understand? for there will be no chance of orders up there. Leave your canteens; leave anything that will hinder or rattle. Those of you who have on spurs, take them off. Those of you who have Tonto or Apache moccasins, take off your top boots and put them on; they are all the better for going up these hill-sides. Now get your coffee, men; make no noise, light no additional fires, and be ready to move in twenty minutes."

Then he pencils this brief note:

"Commanding Officer Troop K, Eleventh Cavalry:

"We have headed the Apaches, and will attack their camp the instant it is light enough to see, rescue their captives, then fall back here to the gorge of the San Simon. They far outnumber us, and you cannot reach us too soon. I count upon your being here by eight in the morning, and hope with your aid to hold the enemy until Greene's command arrives. Then we ought to capture the whole band. Do not fail me.

"FREDERICK LANE,
"*Captain Eleventh Cavalry.*"

This he gives to Sergeant Luce with orders to ride back on the trail until he meets K Troop and deliver it to Lieutenant Mason or whoever is in command; and in half an hour Luce is away.

And now, just as the dawn is breaking and a faint pallid light is stealing through the tree-tops along the rocky range, there come creeping slowly, noiselessly along the slope a score of shadowy forms, crouching from boulder to boulder, from tree to tree. Not a word is spoken, save now and then a whispered caution. Foremost, carbine in hand, is the captain, now halting a moment to give some signal to those nearest him, now peering ahead over the rocks that bar the way. At last he reaches a point where, looking down the dark and rugged hill-side before him, he sees something which causes him to unsling the case in which his field-glasses are carried, to gaze thither long and fixedly. With all eyes upon their leader, the men wait and listen: some cautiously try the hammers of their carbines and loosen a few cartridges in the loops of their prairie-belts. A signal from Lane brings Mr. Royce, the young second lieutenant, to his side. It is the boy's first experience of the kind, and his heart is thumping, but he means to be one of the foremost in the charge when the time comes. Watching closely, the nearest men can see that the captain is pointing out some object nearer at hand than they supposed, and the first sergeant, crouching to a neighboring rock, looks cautiously over, and then eagerly motions to others to join him.

The Apache hiding-place is not three hundred yards away.

Down the mountain-side to the west and up the range to the north their sentries keep vigilant guard against surprise; but what man of their number dreams for an instant that on the south, between them and the Mexican line, there is now closing in to the attack a little troop of veteran campaigners, led by a man whom they have learned to dread before now? Invisible from the valley below or the heights up the range, their smouldering fires can be plainly seen from where Lane and his men are now concealed. But nothing else can be distinguished.

Far over to the western side of the valley the faint red glow tells where lie the ruins of the ranch their young warriors have destroyed, and any moment now their exultant yells may be heard as they come scampering back to camp after a night of deviltry, and then everybody will be up and moving off and well on the way southward before the sun gets over the crest. Lane knows he must make his dash before they can return. There would be little hope of rescue for the poor souls lying there bound and helpless, with all those fierce young fighters close at hand.

The word is passed among the men: "Follow closely, but look well to your footing. Dislodge no stones." Then, slowly and stealthily as before, on they go,—this time down the hill towards the faint lights of the Indian bivouac. A hundred yards more, and Lane holds up his hand, a signal to halt; and here he gives Mr. Royce a few instructions in a low tone. The youngster nods his head and mutters to several of the men as he passes, "Follow me." They disappear among the rocks and trees to the right, and it is evident that they mean to work around to the east of the bivouac, so as to partially encircle them. Little by little the wan light grows brighter, and, close at hand, objects far more distinct. An Indian is just passing in front of the nearest blaze, and is lost in the gloom among the stunted trees. One

or two forms are moving about, but they can only dimly be distinguished. Lane argues, however, that they are getting ready to move, and no time is to be lost.

"Spread out now," is the order, "well to the right and left, and move forward. Be very careful." And once more they resume their cat-like advance. Nearer and nearer they creep upon the unsuspecting foe, and soon many a form of sleeping Apache can be made out, lying around in the grassy basin in which they are hiding for the night. Lane motions to Corporal Riley to come close to his side: "I can see nothing that looks like prisoners: they must be among the trees there, where that farthest fire is burning. Keep close to me with your men. Pass the word to the right, there. All ready."

And now they are so near the Indians that the voices of one or two squaws can be heard chatting in low tones; then the feeble wail of an infant is for a moment brought to their straining ears; then far out over the level valley to the west there is a sound that causes Lane's blood to tingle,—faint, distant, but unmistakable,—a chorus of Apache yells. The raiders are coming back: it is time to strike the blow. Now or never, seems to be the word as the men glance at their leader and then into each other's faces.

"Forward! no shot, no sound, till they see us; then cheer like mad as you charge! Come on, men!"

Quickly now following his lead, they go leaping down the hill-side. Thirty—fifty yards without mishap or discovery. Sixty, and still no sound from the defence; then a sudden stumble, the rattle of a carbine sliding down the rocks, a muttered execration; then a shrill, piercing scream from the midst of the bivouac; then——

"Charge!"

In they go!—the "Devil's own D's." The still air rings with their wild hurrahs and the crash of their carbines. The flame-jets light up the savage scene and show squaws and screaming children rushing for shelter among the rocks; Apache warriors springing from the ground, some manfully facing the rush of the foe, others fleeing like women down the hill-side. Never halting an instant, the soldiers dash through the camp, driving the dusky occupants helter-skelter. Lane finds himself confronted one instant by a savage warrior whose eyes gleam like tiger's under the thatch of coarse black hair, and whose teeth gnash in fury as he tries to force a fresh cartridge into his breech-loader. No time for Lane to reload. He clubs his carbine, and the hammer comes crashing down on the Indian's skull just as Corporal Riley drives a bullet through his heart.

"Look to the captives, man!" shouts Lane. "Don't follow me! Drive them! drive them, Royce!" are his ringing orders, as he himself dashes on past the fires and into the feeble morning light beyond.

Bang! bang! the carbines are ringing through the rocks and trees; cheer upon cheer goes up from the little command, mingled with Indian yells and the screams of the terrified children.

"Riley's got 'em, sir," he hears his boy-trumpeter call. "Some of 'em, anyhow. There's two white women."

"Never mind, lad," he answers. "Don't sound the recall till I tell you."

And again his ringing voice is heard among the tumult: "Forward! forward! drive them! keep them on the run, men!"

And so for five minutes longer, firing whenever a savage head appears, inflicting and receiving many a savage blow, but still victoriously forcing their way onward, the little band follow their leader down the rocks until apparently not an Apache is left in the immediate neighborhood of the old camp. Then at last the trumpet peals out its signal-recall.

And slowly and steadily, watchfully guarding against the possibility of leaving some wounded comrade among the rocks, the little command finally gathers once more around the fires in the camp.

Riley and his men have disappeared. A shout from up the rocks in the well-known Irish voice gives the glad intelligence that he has brought with him all the prisoners he could find in camp.

"There are three women, sir, and two little children,—two girls; they're so frightened that I can hardly find out much from them, but they say there was no more left."

"Very well, then. Now, men, open out right and left, and fall back very slowly. Sergeant, take six of the men and move up so as to be close to Riley in case they attack from the flank. Are we all here? Are any wounded or hurt?" He asks the question with a little stream of blood trickling down from his left temple, but of which he seems perfectly unaware: either an arrow or a bullet has torn the skin and made quite a furrow through the hair.

"Murphy, sir," says one of the men, "is shot through the arm, and Lathrop has got a bullet in the leg; but they're only flesh-wounds: they're lying here just back of us."

Lane turns about, and finds two of his men looking a little pale, but perfectly plucky and self-possessed. "We'll get you along all right, men," he says; "don't worry.—Now, lads, turn about every ten or fifteen steps, and see that they don't get close upon you. Look well to the left."

Then slowly they fall back towards the pass. Every now and then a shot comes whizzing by, as the Apaches regain courage and creep up to their abandoned camp. But not until they are well back over the ridge, and Riley and his little party, fairly carrying their rescued captives, are nearly out of harm's way, do the scattered warriors begin to realize how few in number their assailants must be. Rallying shouts can be heard among the rocks, and then there come the thunder of hoofs out on the plain below and the answering yells of the returning raiders.

"Run to Corporal Riley and tell him to make all the haste he can," Lane orders his trumpeter. "Tell him to get back to the horses, and then, as soon as he has left his women in a safe place there, to throw up stone shelters wherever it is possible.—Royce, you look out for this front. I will go to the left. If any of your men are hit, have them picked up and moved rapidly to the rear; of course we can't leave any wounded to fall into their hands; but, where possible, keep

your men under cover; and keep under yourself, sir: don't let me see you exposing yourself unnecessarily, as I did a while ago."

And once again the retreat is resumed. Lane looks anxiously among the rocks down the hill to his left, every instant expecting to see the young braves hurrying to the assault. But now, as though in obedience to the signals of some leader, the Apaches cease their pursuit. Lane well knows that the matter is not yet concluded, but is thankful for the respite. Still warily his little force continues the withdrawal, and, without further molestation, reaches the gorge of the San Simon, and soon comes in sight of the dip among the rocks where the horses are still hidden. Here, too, Corporal Riley and his men are busily at work heaping up little breastworks of rock, and Lane directs that while the wounded—there are three now—are carried down to where the rescued women and children are lying, the other men fall to and help. In five minutes there are over a score of them at work, and not one instant too soon. Corporal Donnelly, who has been posted, mounted, at the western entrance to the defile, comes clattering in to say that at least a hundred Indians are swarming down the ridge.

And now the fight that opens is one in which the odds are greatly against the defenders. Lane has just time to climb to the height on the east and take one long look with his glasses over the flats beyond the pass, praying for a sight of a dust-cloud towards the Pyramid Spur, when with simultaneous crash of musketry and chorus of yells the Apaches come sweeping down to the attack.

XV.

Meantime, where are the looked-for supports? Lane, with wearied horses, had made the march from the railway-station to the pass in a little over fourteen hours. It was 5.30 when he started and 8.15 when he unsaddled among the rocks. He had come through the blazing sunshine of the long June day; sometimes at the trot, sometimes at the lope, ofttimes dismounting and leading when crossing ridges or ravines. He was still pale and weak from his long illness, and suffering from a sorrow that had robbed him of all the buoyancy he had ever possessed. But the sense of duty was as strong as ever, and the soldier-spirit triumphed over the ills of the flesh.

Noel, starting at 4.45 P.M., with horses and men fresh and eager, with a guide who knew every inch of the way, and the bright starlight to cheer his comrades, could reasonably be expected to cover the same ground in the same time; every old cavalryman knows that horses travel better by night than by day. By good rights he and his men should be at the pass at least an hour before the time set by Lane. It was only a week before that the captain had declared at the "Queen City" that he had never felt so "fit" in his life and a campaign would just suit him. Things seemed to have a different color, however, as he watched the going down of the sun behind the distant Peloncillos. The words of the young infantry adjutant kept recurring to him, and he knew of old that when Lane started after Indians he was "dead sure to get 'em," as Mr. Mason was good enough to remind him.

Twice before sunset the guide had ventured to suggest a quicker gait, but Noel refused, saying that he did not mean to get his horses to the scene worn out and unfit for pursuit. Mr. Mason, who heard this, begged to remind the captain that pursuit was not the object: they were expected to get there in time to help Lane head off the attempt at further flight, and to hold the Apaches, wherever met, until the pursuing force could reach them from the north and hem them in. Noel ranked Mason only a few files and knew well that all the regiment would side with his subaltern: so he was forced to a show of cordiality and consideration. He rode by the lieutenant's side, assuring him of the sense of strength it gave him to have with him a man of such experience. "For your sake, Mason, I wish I had been twelve hours later, so that you could have had the glory of this thing to yourself; but you know I couldn't stand it. I had to pull wires like sin to get relieved, as it was. Old Hudson, the head of the recruiting-service, just swore he wouldn't let me go, because I had had good luck in the class and number of the recruits I sent him. Personally, too, I'm in no shape to ride. See how fat I've grown?"

Mason saw, but said a fifty-mile ride ought not to stagger any cavalryman, hard or soft, and made no reply whatever to the captain's account of how he succeeded in getting relieved. He didn't believe a word of it.

Night came on and found them still marching at steady walk. Halts for rest, too, had been frequently ordered, and at last Mason could stand it no longer. After repeated looks at his watch, he had burst out with an earnest appeal:

"Captain Noel, we'll never get there in time at this rate. Surely, sir, the orders you got from the general must be different from those that came to the post. *They* said, make all speed, lose not a moment. Did not yours say so too?"

"The general knew very well that I had marched cavalry too often not to understand just how to get there in time," was Noel's stately reply; and, though chafing inwardly, Mason was compelled to silence. Ten o'clock came, and still it was no better. Then both the lieutenant and the guide, after a moment's consultation during a rest, approached the captain and begged him to increase the gait; and when they mounted, the command did, for a while, move on at a jog, which Mason would fain have increased to the lope, but Noel interposed. Midnight, and more rests, found them fully ten miles behind the point where the guide and the lieutenant had planned to be. Even the men had begun to murmur among themselves, and to contrast the captain's spiritless advance with Mr. Mason's lively methods. Two o'clock, and the Pyramid Range was still far away. Daybreak came, and Mason was nearly mad with misery, the guide sullen and disgusted. Broad daylight,—six o'clock,—and here at last were the Pyramid Buttes at their right front, and, coming towards them on the trail, a single horseman. "It is Sergeant Luce," said some of the foremost troopers.

And Luce had a note, which he handed to Lieutenant Mason; but that gentleman shook his head and indicated Noel. The captain took it in silence, opened it, glanced over the contents, changed color, as all could see, and then inquired,—

"How far is it, sergeant?"

"It must be fifteen miles from here, sir. I came slowly, because my horse was worn out, and because Captain Lane thought that I would meet the troop very much nearer the pass. It's more than fifteen miles, I reckon."

"Had the attack begun before you left?"

"Yes, sir; and I could hear the shots as I came out of the pass,—hear them distinctly."

"May I inquire what the news is, captain?" said Mr. Mason, riding up to his side.

"Well," was the reply, "Lane writes that he has headed the Apaches, and that he is just moving in to the attack.

"Will you permit me to see the note, sir?" said Mason, trembling with exasperation at the indifferent manner in which it was received.

Noel hesitated: "Presently,—presently, Mr. Mason. We'll move forward at a trot, now."

Sergeant Luce reined about, and, riding beside the first sergeant of K Troop, told him in low tones of the adventures of the previous day and night, and the fact that the Apaches were there just north of the pass and in complete force. The result seemed to be, as the word was passed among the men, to increase the gait to such an extent that they crowded upon the leaders, and Noel, time and again, threw up his hand and warned the men not to ride over the heels of his horse.

Seven o'clock came, and still they had not got beyond the Pyramids. Eight o'clock, and they were not in sight of the pass. Nine o'clock, and still the gorge was not in view. It was not until nearly ten that the massive gate-way seemed to open before them, and then, far to the front, their eager ears could catch the sound of sharp and rapid firing.

"My God!" said Mason, with irrepressible excitement, "there's no question about it, captain, Lane's surrounded there! For heaven's sake, sir, let's get ahead to his support."

"Ride forward, sergeant," said Noel to Luce, "and show us the shortest way you know to where Captain Lane has corralled his horses. —I don't like the idea of entering that pass in column, Mr. Mason. The only safe way to do it will be to dismount and throw a line of skirmishers ahead. If Lane is surrounded, the Apaches undoubtedly will open fire on us as we pass through."

"Suppose they do, sir: we've got men enough to drive them back. What we want is to get through there as quickly as possible."

But Noel shook his head, and, forming line to the front at a trot, moved forward a few hundred yards, and then, to the intense disgust of Mr. Mason, ordered the first platoon dismounted and pushed ahead as skirmishers. Compelled to leave their horses with number four of each set, the other troopers, sullenly, but in disciplined silence, advanced afoot up the gentle slope which led to the heights on the right of the gorge.

Not a shot impeded their advance; not a sound told them that they were even watched. But far up through the pass itself the sound of sharp firing continued, and every now and then a shrill yell indicated that the Apaches were evidently having the best of it.

Again Mason rode to his captain. "I beg you, sir," he said, "to let me take my platoon, or the other one, and charge through there. It isn't possible that they can knock more than one or two of us out of the saddle; and if you follow with the rest of the men they can easily be taken care of." But Noel this time rebuked him.

"Mr. Mason, I have had too much of your interference," he said, "and I will tolerate no more. I am in command of this troop, sir, and I am responsible for its proper conduct."

And Mason, rebuffed, fell back without further word.

The pass was reached, and still not a shot had been fired. Over the low ridge the dismounted troopers went, and not an Apache was in sight. Then at last it became evident that to cross the stream they would have to ford; and then the "recall" was sounded, the horses were run rapidly forward to the skirmish-line, the men swung into saddle, the rear platoon closed on the one in front, and cautiously, with Mason leading and Noel hanging back a little as though to direct the march of his column, the troop passed through the river and came out on the other side. The moment they reached the bank, Mason struck a trot without any orders, and the men followed him.

Noel hastened forward, shouting out, "Walk, walk." But, finding that they either did not or would not hear him, he galloped in front of the troop, and sternly ordered the leaders to decrease their gait and not again to take the trot unless he gave the command.

Just at this minute, from the heights to the right and left, half a dozen shots were fired in quick succession; a trooper riding beside the first sergeant threw up his arms, with the sudden cry, "My God! I've got it!" and fell back from the saddle. Noel at the same instant felt a twinge along his left arm, and, wheeling his horse about, shouted, "To the rear! to the rear! We're ambushed!" And, despite the rallying cry of Mason and the entreaties of the guide, the men, taking the cue from their leader, reined to the right and left about and went clattering out of the pass.

More shots came from the Apaches, some aimed at the fleeing troop and others at the little group of men that remained behind; for the poor fellow who had been shot through the breast lay insensible by the side of the stream, and would have been abandoned to his fate but for the courage and devotion of Mason and two of the leading men. Promptly jumping from their horses, they raised him between them, and, laying him across the pommel of one of the saddles, supported by the troopers, the wounded man was carried back to the ford, and from there out of harm's way.

By this time Noel, at full gallop, had gone four or five hundred yards to the rear, and there the first sergeant—not he—rallied the troop, reformed it, counted fours, and faced it to the front.

When Mason returned to them, leading the two troopers and the dying man, his face was as black as a thunder-cloud. He rode up to his captain, who was stanching with a handkerchief a little stream of blood that seemed to be coming down his left arm, and addressed to him these words:

"Captain Noel, there were not more than six or eight Apaches

guarding those heights. There was no excuse in God's world, sir, for a retreat. I can take my platoon and go through there now without difficulty, and once again, sir, I implore you to let me do it."

Noel's reply was, "I have already heard too much from you to-day, Mr. Mason. If I hear one more word, you go to the rear in arrest. I am wounded, sir, but I will not turn over this command to you."

"Wounded be hanged! Captain Noel, you've got a scratch of which a child ought to be ashamed," was the furious reply, upon which Noel, considering that he must at all hazards preserve the dignity of his position, ordered Lieutenant Mason to consider himself in arrest. And, dismounting, and calling to one or two of the men to assist him, the captain got out of his blouse and had the sleeve of his under-shirt cut off, and then, in full hearing of the combat up the pass, proceeded to have a scratch, as Mason had truly designated it, stanched and dressed.

Meantime, the troop, shamefaced and disgusted, dismounted and awaited further developments. For fifteen minutes they remained there, listening to the battle a mile away, and then there came a sound that thrilled every man with excitement,—with mad longing to dash to the front: there came crashes of musketry that told of the arrival of strong reinforcements for one party or another,—which party was soon developed by the glorious, ringing cheers that they well recognized to be those of their comrades of Greene's battalion.

"By heavens!" said Mason, with a groan, "after all, we have lost our chance! It's Greene, not old K Troop, that got there in time to save them."

The looks that were cast towards their new captain by the men, standing in sullen silence at their horses' heads, were not those that any soldier would have envied.

Directing the first sergeant to take half a dozen troopers and feel their way cautiously to the front and ascertain what that new sound meant, the rest of the men meanwhile to remain at ease, Noel still sat there on the ground, as though faint from loss of blood. The bleeding, however, had been too trifling to admit of any such supposition on the part of those who had been looking on. The cheering up the pass increased. The firing rapidly died away. Soon it was seen that the first sergeant was signalling, and presently a man came riding back. The sergeant and the others disappeared, going fearlessly into the pass, and evidently indicating by their movements that they anticipated no further resistance. The arriving horseman dismounted, saluted the captain, and reported substantially that the pass was now in possession of Major Greene's men, and that the Apaches were in full flight towards the south, some of the troops pursuing.

Then at last it was that the "mount" was sounded by the trumpeter, and half an hour afterwards—full three hours after they should have been there—Captain Noel with K Troop arrived at the scene. Lane, faint from loss of blood, was lying under a tree; four of his men were killed; one of the helpless recaptured women had been shot by an Indian bullet; five more of the "Devil's own D's" were lying wounded around among the rocks. Desperate had been the defence; sore had

been their need; safe, thoroughly safe, they would have been had Noel got there in time; but it was Greene's battalion that finally reached them only at the last moment. And yet this was the thrilling announcement that appeared in the Queen City *Chronicle* in its morning edition, two days afterwards:

"Gallant Noel! Rescue of the Indian Captives! Stirring Pursuit and Fierce Battle with the Apaches!

"A despatch received last night by the Hon. Amos Withers announces the return from the front of Captain Noel, who so recently left our midst, with a portion of his troop, bringing with him the women and children who had been run off by the Apaches on their raid among the ranches south of their reservation. The captain reports a severe fight, in which many of the regiment were killed and wounded, he himself, though making light of the matter, receiving a bullet through the left arm.

"While the rest of the command had gone on in pursuit of the Apaches, the captain was sent by the battalion commander to escort the captives back to the railway.

"This despatch, though of a private character, is fully substantiated by the official report of the general commanding the department to the Adjutant-General of the army. It reads as follows:

"'Captain Noel, of the Eleventh Cavalry, has just reached the railway, bringing with him all but one of the women and children whom the Apaches had carried off into captivity. The other was shot by a bullet in the desperate fight which occurred in San Simon Pass between the commands of Captains Lane and Noel and the Apaches, whose retreat they were endeavoring to head off. Greene's battalion of the Eleventh arrived in time to take part; but on their appearance the Apaches fled through the mountains in the wildest confusion, leaving much of their plunder behind them.

"'It is impossible as yet to give accurate accounts of the killed and wounded, but our losses are reported to have been heavy.'

"How thoroughly have the predictions of the *Chronicle* with regard to this gallant officer been fulfilled! To his relatives and his many friends in our midst the *Chronicle* extends its most hearty congratulations. We predict that the welcome which Captain Noel will receive will be all that his fondest dreams could possibly have cherished."

XVI.

For a week the story of Gordon Noel's heroism was the talk of Queen City society. He had led the charge upon the Indians after a pursuit of over a hundred miles through the desert. He had fought his way to the cave in which those poor captive women were guarded, and had himself cut the thongs that bound them. He was painfully wounded, but never quit the fight till the last savage was driven from the field. For daring and brilliant conduct he was to be promoted over the heads of all the captains in his regiment. His name was already before the President for a vacancy in the Adjutant-General's Department, and the appointment would be announced at once. He

was coming East just as soon as the surgeon said he was well enough to travel. Mrs. Noel wanted to join him, but he had telegraphed saying no, that he would soon be with her.

So rang the chorus for several days. At the club the men shook hands over the news, and sent telegrams of praise and congratulation to Noel, and drank his health in bumpers; and two or three "old soreheads," who ventured to point out that the official reports were not yet in, were pooh-poohed and put down.

Amos Withers had left for Washington on a midnight train immediately after furnishing the *Chronicle* with the contents of his despatch, making no allusion to that part of it which said, "Now push for that vacancy. Not an instant must be lost." Nobody could say nay to the man who had subscribed the heaviest sum to the campaign fund in his own State, and therefore both its Senators and half its representatives in the House went with him to the President to urge the immediate nomination of Captain Noel to the majority in the Adjutant-General's Department made vacant by the promotion consequent upon the retirement of one of its oldest members. Already the War Department had furnished the Executive with the names and records of the four men whom it considered most deserving, and Gordon Noel's name was not one of the four. But what was that in comparison with the eminent pecuniary and political services of Mr. Withers, when the nephew had just behaved so superbly in action?

Meantime, the Apaches had scattered through the mountains and escaped across the border, the remnant of Lane's troop taking part in the pursuit, and they, with their commander, only slowly returning to the railway. For three or four days Noel had the wires and the correspondents pretty much to himself; but then some of those enterprising news-gatherers had been getting particulars from the men, and there were two or three of K Troop in the detachment who could not conceal their derision and contempt when the newspaper-men spoke of the bravery of their captain. This set the correspondents to ferreting, and then the despatches began to take a different color. The very day that Mabel received her first letter from her husband, and was reading extracts from it to envious friends who had come in to swell the chorus of jubilee and congratulation, an evening paper intimated that recent despatches received from the seat of war revealed a different state of affairs than was popularly supposed.

But by this time interest was waning. It is the first impression that is always the strongest, the first story that is longest remembered, and no man who has believed one version will accept the truth without vigorous resistance. In his letter to his wife, Noel had spoken modestly of himself and slightingly of his wounds. This only made her worship him—her hero, her gallant Gordon—the more insanely. He intimated that he had been compelled to place in arrest one of the prominent officers of the regiment for misconduct in the face of the enemy; and this *and previous matters*, he said, would surely make of this officer an unrelenting foe. She need not be surprised, therefore, if this gentleman should strive to do him grievous harm. Mabel blushed becomingly as she read these lines to some of her friends, and that night

at the club it was hinted that Lane had been placed in close arrest for failing to support Noel in his desperate assault. Just at this time, too, Mr. Withers came back from Washington, looking mysterious.

The next published despatches were from the general himself. He was incensed over the escape of the Apaches. Measures for the capture were complete, and it was broadly hinted that a certain officer would be brought to trial for his failure to carry out positive orders.

"It is believed," said the *Chronicle*, "that the officer referred to is well known in our community, as he had, oddly enough, been a predecessor in the recruiting-service of the actual hero of the campaign."

Two weeks went by. There was no announcement of Noel's name as promoted. Other matters occupied the attention of the club and the coteries, and no one knew just what it all meant when it was announced that Mrs. Noel had suddenly left for the frontier to join her husband. Perhaps his wounds were more severe than at first reported. Then it was noticed that Mr. Withers was in a very nervous and irritable frame of mind, that constant despatches were passing between him and Captain Noel in the West, and that suddenly he departed again on some mysterious errand for Washington. And then it was announced that Captain Noel would not be able to visit the East as had been expected.

All the same it came as a shock which completely devastated the social circles of the Queen City when it was announced in the New York and Chicago papers that a general court-martial had been ordered to assemble at Fort Gregg, New Mexico, for the trial of Captain Gordon Noel, Eleventh Cavalry, on charges of misbehavior in the face of the enemy, and conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

The *Chronicle* made no allusion to the matter until after it was heralded over the city by the other journals. Then it announced that it was in possession of information showing conclusively that Captain Noel was the victim of the envy of certain officers in his regiment, and that the charges had been trumped up from the false and prejudiced statement of the man whom he had been compelled to place in arrest for misconduct in action. "Captain Noel had demanded a court-martial," said the *Chronicle*, "that he might be triumphantly vindicated, as he undoubtedly would be."

At the club several men surrounded Lieutenant Bowen with eager inquiry as to the facts in the case. Bowen, who was now in charge of the rendezvous as Noel's successor, was very reticent when interrogated. He said that while an officer might demand a court of inquiry, he could not demand a court-martial; they were entirely different things; and it was certainly the latter that had been ordered.

"Was there not some likelihood of malice and envy being at the bottom of the charges?" he was asked. "And was it not unfair to let him be tried by officers prejudiced against him?"

Bowen said he did not belong to the Eleventh, but he knew it well enough to say no to the first part of the question. As to the other, there were only two officers from that regiment on the court, and one was Noel's old friend and colonel,—Riggs.

It was in the midst of this talk that Mr. Amos Withers had suddenly appeared and begged a few words in private with Mr. Bowen.

Withers was in a state of nervous excitement, as any one could see. He talked eagerly, even pleadingly, with the silent lieutenant, and at last suddenly arose and, with the look of a defeated and discomfited man, left the club-house, entered his carriage, and was driven rapidly away.

That night an officer from the War Department arrived in the Queen City, and was closeted for a while with Lieutenant Bowen, after which the two went to the Chief of Police, and, in company with him, visited the cell where Taintor, deserter and forger, was confined, took his statement and that of the Chief, and with these documents the officer went on to division head-quarters.

Meantime, the campaign had come to an end. Captain Noel had reported, in arrest, to the commanding officer at Fort Gregg, and Mrs. Riggs had tearfully greeted him: "She would so love to have him under her roof, that she might show her sympathy and friendship; but so many officers of high rank were coming on the court that the colonel was compelled to give every bit of room he had to them." Noel thanked her nervously, and said he could be comfortable anywhere, but his wife was coming: she had telegraphed that she could not be separated from him when he was suffering wrong and outrage. Captain and Mrs. Lowndes, moved to instant sympathy, begged that he would make their quarters his home, and placed their best room at his disposal.

Two evenings afterwards he was permitted to go himself to the railway to meet poor Mabel, who threw herself into his arms and almost sobbed her heart out at sight of his now haggard and care-worn face. Mrs. Lowndes then came forward and strove to comfort her, while Noel rushed off to send some telegrams. Then they drove out to the post, and Mabel's spirits partially revived when she found that it was not a prison she had come to share with her husband. Everybody was so gentle and kind to her, she began to believe there was nothing very serious in the matter, after all.

It lacked yet five days to the meeting of the court, and in the intervening time there arrived at the post a prominent and distinguished lawyer from the East, sent to conduct the defence by Mr. Withers's orders; and many a long talk did he hold with his client and the officers who were gathering at Gregg.

The charges of misconduct in face of the enemy had been preferred by the Department commander, who cited as his witnesses Captain Lane, Lieutenant Mason, Lieutenant Royce, the guide, and two or three non-commissioned officers. To the charge of "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" there were specifications setting forth that he had caused to be circulated and published reports to the effect that it was his command that had been severely engaged, and his command that had rescued the captives and defeated the Indians, which statements he well knew to be false. Two or three correspondents and railway employees and the telegraph operator were witnesses. This would be a hard one to prove affirmatively, as the judge-advocate found when he examined his witnesses as they arrived, and the great lawyer assured the accused officer that he could secure him an acquittal on that

charge. The real danger lay in the testimony of Captain Lane and Lieutenant Mason, who had not yet come.

And now, hour after hour, for two days, Mabel was reading in her husband's face the utter hopelessness that possessed him; nay, more, the truth was being revealed to her in all its damning details. It might be impossible for the prosecution to prove that he had actually caused the false and boastful stories to be given to the press and the public; but how about the telegrams and letters Mr. Withers had so proudly come to show her? How about the telegrams and letters she herself had received? What impression could she derive from them but that he was the hero of the whole affair, and that he was lying painfully wounded when he wrote? The gash through the beautiful white arm turned out to be a mere scratch upon the skin, that a pin might have made. It was Greene's command from Fort Graham that had rescued Lane, and Lane with his men who had rescued the captives, and then fought so hard, so desperately, against such fearful odds, and sustained their greatest losses, while her hero,—her Gordon,—with nearly fifty men, was held only a mile away by half a dozen ragamuffins in the rocks. She had almost adored him, believing him godlike in courage and magnanimity; but now on every side the real facts were coming to light, and she even wrung them from his reluctant lips. And yet—and yet—he was her husband, and she loved him.

Again and again did she question Mr. Falconer, the eminent counsel, as to the possibilities. This gentleman had fought all through the war of the rebellion, and had won high commendation for bravery. He had taken the case because he believed, on Withers's statement, that Noel was a wronged and injured man, and because, possibly, a fee of phenomenal proportion could be looked for. He met among the old captains of the Eleventh men whom he had known in Virginia in the war-days, and learned from them what Noel's real reputation was, and, beyond peradventure, how he had shirked and played the coward in the last campaign: so that he, who had known Mabel Vincent from her babyhood and loved her old father, now shrank from the sorrow of having to tell her the truth. Yet she demanded it, and he had to say that her husband's fate hinged on the evidence that might be given by Captain Lane and Mr. Mason.

That very night these two officers arrived, together with three members of the court. The following day at ten o'clock the court was to begin its session, and four of its members were still to come. That night Mr. Falconer and her husband were closeted with several men in succession, seeking evidence for the defence. That night there came a despatch from Withers saying he had done his best in Washington, but that it seemed improbable that the President would interfere and accept Noel's resignation from the service.

Noel showed this to Mabel and sank upon the sofa with a groan of despair.

"Oh, my darling!" she whispered, kneeling by his side and throwing her arms about his neck, "don't give way! There must be hope yet! They cannot prove such cruel charges! There must be a way of averting this trouble."

"There is one," said he, starting up. "There is one, if you will only do it to save me."

"What would I not do to save you, Gordon?" she asked, though her face was paling now with awful dread of what the demand might be.

"Mabel, my wife, it is to see—him at once. There is nothing that he will not do for you. I know it—for I know what he has done. See him. You know what to say. I cannot prompt you. But get him to tell as little as he possibly can in regard to this case."

"Gordon!" she cried, "you ask me to do this, after the great wrong I did him?"

"There is no other way," was the sullen answer. And he turned moodily from her side, leaving her stunned, speechless.

XVII.

Somewhere about ten o'clock that night the judge-advocate of the court dropped in at the "bachelor quarters," where both Lane and Mason had been made welcome, and asked to see those gentlemen. He was conversing with them over the affair at the San Simon, when Captain Lowndes was ushered into the room.

"Am I intruding?" asked the latter. "I merely wished to speak to Lane a moment."

"By no means, Lowndes. Come right in. We'll be through in one minute.—Then, as I understand you, Lane, you could distinctly see K Troop as it forded the stream, and could see the Apaches who fired upon them?"

"Yes,—distinctly. I was praying for their coming, as our ammunition was running low. The Indians seemed so encouraged by the ease with which they drove them back that the whole band swarmed out from cover and crowded on us at once. It was in the next fifteen minutes that my men were killed,—and that poor woman."

"And there were only six Indians who opened fire on Noel?"

"Only six, sir."

The judge-advocate was silent a moment. "There is, of course, a chance that our absentees may get here to-morrow morning in time. If they do, you will be the first witness called; if they do not, we adjourn to await their arrival. It promises to be a long case. A telegram has just reached me, saying that additional and grave charges are being sent by mail from division head-quarters."

Captain Lowndes listened to this brief conversation with an expression of deep perplexity on his kindly face, and as soon as the judge-advocate had gone and Mason had left the room he turned to Lane:

"You know they are staying with us. That poor girl has come all this weary journey to be with him, and there was absolutely no place where she could lay her head unless we opened our doors and took him in too."

Lane bowed assent: "I had heard, Lowndes. It was like you and that dear wife of yours."

"Lane," spoke the older man, impetuously, after a moment of em-

barrassed silence, "I want you to do something for my wife, and for me. Come home with me for a few minutes. You won't see him; but—it is that heart-broken girl. She begs that you will see her,—to-night. Here is a little note."

Lane's sad face had grown deathly pale. He looked wonderingly in his companion's eyes a moment, then slowly took the note and left the room, leaving Lowndes to pace the floor in much disquiet.

In five minutes the former reappeared in the door-way. "Come," he said, and himself led the way out into the starlit night. Not a word was spoken by either man as they slowly walked down the row. Arriving at his quarters, Captain Lowndes ushered his friend into the little army parlor, and Mrs. Lowndes came forward, extending both her hands. "It is good of you to come," she said. "I will let her know, at once."

Two shaded lamps cast a soft, subdued light over the simply-furnished little room. What a contrast to the sumptuous surroundings of the home in which he had last met her! Lane stood by the little work-table a moment, striving to subdue the violent beating of his heart and the tremors that shook his frame. Not once had he seen her since that wretched night in the library,—in that man Noel's arms. Not once had he permitted the thought of seeing her to find a lodgement. But all was different now: she was well-nigh crushed, heart-broken; she had been deceived and tricked; she was here practically friendless. "I well know that at your hands I deserve no such mercy," she had written, "but a hopeless woman begs that you will come to her for a few moments,—for a very few words."

And now he heard her foot-fall on the stairs. She entered, slowly, and then stopped short almost at the threshold. Heavens! how he had aged and changed! How deep were the lines about the kind gray eyes! how sad and worn was the stern, soldierly face! Her eyes filled with tears on the very instant, and she hovered there, irresolute, not knowing what to do, how to address him. It was Lane that came to the rescue. For a moment he stood there appalled as his eyes fell upon the woman whom he had so utterly—so faithfully loved. Where was all the playful light that so thrilled and bewitched him as it flickered about the corners of her pretty mouth? Whither had fled the bright coloring, the radiance, the gladness, that lived in that exquisite face? Was this heavy-eyed, pallid, nerveless being, standing with hanging head before him, the peerless queen he had so loyally and devotedly served,—whose faintest wish was to him a royal mandate,—to kiss whose soft white hand was a joy unutterable? All this flashed through his mind in the instant of her irresolute pause. Then the great pity of a strong and manful heart, the tenderness that lives ever in the bravest, sent him forward to her side. All thought of self and suffering, of treachery and concealment and deception, vanished at once at the sight of her bitter woe. His own brave eyes filled up with tears he would gladly have hidden, but that she saw, and was comforted. He took her limp, nerveless hand and led her to a chair, saying only her name,—"Mrs. Noel."

For several minutes she could not speak, but wept unrestrainedly,

he, poor fellow, walking the floor the while, longing to comfort her, yet powerless. What could he say? What could he do? At last she seemed to regain her self-control.

"Captain Lane," she said, "it is useless for me to tell you how much I have learned, since coming here, of which I was ignorant before. Every effort has been made to spare me; people have been so considerate and kind, that the truth, as I am beginning to see, has been kept from me. Mr. Falconer, Captain Noel's—our lawyer, has at last admitted that almost everything depends upon your evidence. Forgive me, if you can, that I believed for a while that you inspired the charges against him. I know now that you refused to press the matter, and that—that I am not to blame any one. In his deep misfortune my duty is with my husband, and he—consented that I should see you. Captain Lane," she said, rising as she spoke, "do not try to spare my feelings now. I am prepared for anything,—ready to share his downfall. If you are asked as to the contents of the note you sent him just before the fight, must you tell what they were? Do you recall them?"

"I must, Mrs. Noel. I remember almost the exact words," he replied, gently, sorrowfully.

"But that is all, is it not? You know nothing more about the delay in reaching you?" And her eyes, piteous in entreaty, in shame, in suffering, sought one instant his sad face, then fell before the sorrow and sympathy in his.

For a moment there was no answer; and at last she looked up, alarmed.

"Mrs. Noel," he said, "I could not help it. I was eagerly awaiting their coming. I saw them approach the ford and the pass. I saw that there were only six Apaches to resist them; and the next thing I saw was the retreat."

"Oh, Captain Lane!" she cried, "must you testify as to this?" And her trembling hands were clasped in misery. "Is there *no* way, —*no* way?"

"Even if there were," he answered, slowly and mournfully, "Mr. Mason's testimony and that of the men would be still more conclusive."

Throwing herself upon the sofa, the poor girl gave way to a fit of uncontrollable weeping; and Lane stood helplessly, miserably by. Once he strove to speak, but she could not listen. He brought her a glass of water presently and begged her to drink it: there was still something he had to suggest. She took the goblet from his hand and looked up eagerly through her tears. He was thinking only of her—for her—now. The man who had robbed him of happiness, of love, of wife and home and hope, and who had done the utmost that he dared to rob him of honor and his soldier reputation,—the man now wretchedly listening overhead to the murmur of voices below,—he forgot entirely except as the man she loved.

"Mrs. Noel, your friends—his friends—are most influential. Can they not be telegraphed to that his resignation will be tendered? Can they not stop the trial in that way?"

"It is hopeless. It *has* been tried, and refused. If he is found guilty there is nothing left,—nothing left," she moaned, "but to take

him back to the East with me, and, with the little we have now, to buy some quiet home in the country, where our wretched past need not be known,—where we can be forgotten,—where my poor husband need not have to hang his head in shame. Oh, God! oh, God! what a ruined life!"

"Is there nothing I *can* do for you, Mrs. Noel? Listen: that court cannot begin the—the case to-morrow. Four members are still to come. It may be two days yet,—perhaps three. Perhaps Mr. Withers and his friends do not appreciate the danger and have not brought pressure to bear on the President, but—forgive me for the pain this must give you—there are other, new charges coming from division head-quarters, that I fear will harm him still more. I grieve to have to tell you this. Try and make Mr. Withers understand. Try and get the resignation through. If you will see Mr. Falconer and—and the captain now, I can get the telegraph operator."

"What charges—what new accusations do you mean?" she asked, her eyes dilating with dread. "Are we not crushed enough already? Oh, forgive me, Captain Lane! I ought not to speak bitterly, you—you have been so good, so gentle. You, the last man on earth from whom I should seek mercy," she broke forth impetuously,—"*you* are yet the one to whom I first appeal. Oh, if after this night I never see you again, believe that I suffer, that I realize the wrong I have done. I was never worthy the faintest atom of your regard; but there's one thing—one thing you must hear. I wrote you fully, frankly, imploringly, before—before you came—and saw. Indeed, indeed, I had waited days for your reply, refusing to see him until after papa died; and then I was weak and ill. You never read the letter. You sent them all back unopened. I cannot look in your face. It may have been hard, for a while, but the time will soon come when you will thank God—thank God—I proved faithless."

And then, leaving him to make his own way from the house, she rushed sobbing to her room. When next he saw her, Reginald, her brother, with Lowndes and his tearful wife, was lifting her into the ambulance that was to take them to the railway, and the doctor rode away beside them. But this was ten days after.

True to Lane's prediction, the court met and adjourned on the following day. Colonel Stannard and Major Turner telegraphed that they were delayed *en route* to the railway, and nothing was heard from the other missing members. Two days more found the court in readiness, but the trial did not begin. There arrived on the express from the East, the night before all seemed ready for the opening session, Lieutenant Bowen, of the cavalry recruiting-service, with two guards who escorted the ex-clerk Taintor.

Telegrams for Captain Noel had been coming in quick succession, but he himself was not seen. It was Lowndes who took the replies to the office. The first meeting of the court was to have occurred on Monday. Tuesday evening the judge-advocate sent to the accused officer a copy of the additional specifications to the charge of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman, and notified him that the witnesses had just arrived by train.

At four o'clock Wednesday morning Mrs. Lowndes was aroused by a tapping at her door, and recognized the voice of Mrs. Noel calling her name. Hastily she arose and went to her, finding her trembling and terrified. Gordon, she said, had been in such misery that he would not undress and try to sleep, but had been restlessly pacing the floor until after midnight. Then he had gone down to make some memoranda, he said, at the desk in which he and Mr. Falconer had their papers, and, as she could not sleep, she soon followed; but he was not there. Occasionally he had gone out late at night and walked about the parade after every one but the guard had gone to bed, and she thought he must have done so this time, and so waited, and waited, and peered out on the parade and could see nothing of him. At last she could bear it no longer.

Lowndes had heard the sobbing voice and one or two words. He was up and dressed in no time, and speedily found the officer of the day. "Do you think he could have made away with himself?—suicide?"

"Suicide! no!" answered Lieutenant Tracy. "He's too big a coward even for that!"

No sentry had seen or heard anything of him. The whole post was searched at daybreak, and without success. A neighboring settlement, infested by miners, stock-men, gamblers, and fugitives from justice, was visited, but nothing was learned that would tend to dispel the mystery. One or two hard citizens—saloon-proprietors—poked their tongues in their cheeks and intimated that "if properly approached" they could give valuable information; but no one believed them. That night, deserted and well-nigh distracted, Mabel Noel lay moaning in her little room, suffering heaven only knows what tortures; far from the yearning mother arms, far from home and kindred, far even from the recreant husband for whose poor sake she had abandoned all to follow him, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or in health,—only to be left to the pity and care of strangers.

But she was in an army home and among loving, loyal, simple hearts. The women, one and all, thronged to the little cottage, imploring that they might "help in some way." The men, when they were not damning the runaway, were full of suggestion as to the course to be pursued. Mabel would accept only one explanation of his disappearance: crazed by misfortunes, he had taken his own life; he had said he would. But the regiment could not believe it, and in forty-eight hours had traced him, on the saloon-keeper's horse, over to the Southern Pacific, and thence down to El Paso. More than one man gave a sigh of relief that the whole thing could be so easily settled without the scandal of all that evidence being published to the world. The court met and adjourned pending the receipt of orders from the convening authority. The telegraph speedily directed the return to their stations of the several members. Lieutenant Bowen went back to the East, leaving Taintor in the guard-house, and in a week Reginald Vincent came to take his sister home and to whisper that Gordon was safe in the city of Mexico,—Mr. Withers was sending him money there; and so from her bed of illness, suffering, and humiliation the poor girl

was almost carried to her train, and all Fort Gregg could have wept at sight of her wan and hopeless face.

She shrank from seeing or meeting any of her old associates, yet was eager to reach her mother's roof, fondly believing that there she would find letters from her husband. It hurt her inexpressibly that he should have fled without one word to her of his intentions; but she could forgive it because of the suffering and misery that bore him down and unsettled his mind. It stung her that Mr. Withers, not she, should be the first to learn of his place of refuge; but perhaps he thought she had gone East at once, and so had written there. She attributed his desertion to the strain to which he had been subjected; but she had been spared the sight of those last "specifications." Her first inquiry, after one long, blessed clasping in her mother's arms, after the burst of tears that could not be restrained, was for letters from him; and she was amazed, incredulous, when told there were none. Mr. Withers was sent for at once: that eminent citizen would gladly have dodged the ordeal, but could not. He could only say that two telegrams and two drafts had reached him from Noel, and that he had honored the latter at sight and would see that he lacked for nothing.

She would have insisted on going to join him in his exile, but he had sent no word or line; he had ignored her entirely. He might be ill, was the first thought; but Mr. Withers assured her he was physically perfectly well. "Everything is being done now to quietly end the trouble," said Mr. Withers. "We will see to it at Washington that his resignation is now accepted; for they will never get him before a court, and might as well make up their minds to it. They cannot drop or dismiss him for a year, with all their red-tape methods and their prate about the 'honor of the service.' I've seen enough of the army in the last three months to convince me it's no place for a gentleman. No, my dear, you stay here,—or go up to the mountains. We'll have him there to join you in a month."

But the authorities proved obdurate. Even the millionaire failed to move the War Secretary. Unless Captain Noel came back and stood trial, he would be "dropped for desertion" ("and, if he came back and stood trial, would probably be kicked out as a coward and liar," thought to himself the official who sat a silent listener). This Noel would not do. Withers sent him to Vera Cruz on a pseudo business-visit, and Mabel, silent, sad-faced, but weeping no more, went to a little resort in the West Virginia mountains.

Meantime, another court had been convened, another deserter tried, convicted, and sentenced, and before being taken to prison he made full statement to Captain Lane and two officers called in as witnesses. This was Taintor. He had known Captain Noel ever since his entry into service. Taintor was an expert penman, a gambler, and at times a hard drinker. He had enlisted in the troop of which Noel was second lieutenant while they were in Tennessee, and had deserted, after forging the post-quartermaster's name to two checks and getting the money. The regiment went to the Plains: he was never apprehended, and long years afterwards drifted from a position in the quartermaster's dépôt at Jeffersonville to a re-enlistment and a billet as clerk in the recruiting

rendezvous at the Queen City. Knowing that Noel would recognize him, he deserted there, as has been told, taking all the money he could secure by forged checks for small amounts which he trusted would not excite suspicion. But he had fallen in love with a young woman, and she was dependent on him. He came back to the neighborhood after he thought the hue and cry was over, was shadowed and arrested by the police, and had given himself up for lost when Captain Noel was brought to his cell to identify him. He could hardly believe his senses when the captain said it was all a mistake. Then he was released, and went to work again across the river, and one night Noel came,—told him he knew him perfectly and would keep his secret provided he would "make himself useful." It soon turned out that what was wanted was the imitation of Captain Lane's signature on one or two papers whose contents he did not see, and the type-writing of some letters, one of which, without signature of any kind, and referring to some young lady, her secret meetings with Captain Noel, and saying, "You are being betrayed," was sent to Captain Lane at Fort Graham. Very soon after this Captain Lane came back. Taintor again fled until he knew his old commander had gone away, and then, venturing home, was rearrested, as has also been told.

Lane knew the anonymous letter well enough, but now for the first time saw its object. It was to make him accuse Mabel Vincent of deceit and faithlessness and so bring about a rupture of the engagement which, at that time, Noel saw no other means of removing as the one obstacle that stood in the way of his hopes.

But what were the other papers?

August came, and with it the rumors of the appearance of the dreaded *vómito* at Vera Cruz; but in the remote and peaceful nook where mother and daughter—two silent and sorrowing women—were living in retirement, no tidings came. Vainly Mabel watched the mails for letters—if only one—from him. She had written under cover to Mr. Withers, but even that evoked no reply.

One sunshiny afternoon they were startled by the sudden arrival of Regy. He sought to avoid question and to draw his mother to one side, but Mabel was upon him.

"You have news!" she said, her white face set, her hands firmly seizing his arm. "What is it? · Have they dismissed him?"

"They can never dismiss—never harm him more, Mabel," was the solemn answer.

* * * * * * * * *

Some months afterwards Mrs. Vincent received a packet of papers that belonged to the late Captain Noel. Mabel had been sent to Florida for the winter, and was spending her early widowhood with kind and loving friends. The consul at Vera Cruz had written to Mr. Withers full particulars of his cousin's death,—one of the first victims of the *vómito*,—and had sent these papers with the formal certificates of the Mexican officials. Mr. Woodrow, one of the executors of Mr. Vincent's estate, showed singular desire to examine these papers, but the widow thought they should be opened only by her daughter. It was not until then that, with much hesitancy, the gentleman explained

that Mr. Vincent had given him to understand that he had intrusted some papers to Captain Noel which that officer had promised to send at once to his old friend Captain Lane. Mrs. Vincent could learn no more from him, but she lost no time in searching the packet.

Within twenty-four hours Mabel was summoned home by telegraph, and there for the first time learned that to her father's partner, for the use of the firm in their sore straits of nearly two years before, Captain Lane had given the sum of fifteen thousand dollars, and that among Captain Noel's papers was what purported to be a receipt in full for the return of the sum from Mr. Vincent, which receipt was signed apparently by Frederick Lane and dated July 2, 188–. But this, said Mr. Woodrow, must be a mistake: Mr. Vincent had assured him late in July that he had not repaid it, but that Clark had his instructions to repay it at once, and all Clark's books, papers, and receipts had been examined, and showed that no such payment had been made.

"It simply means that the very roof under which we are sheltered is not ours, but that noble fellow's," said Mrs. Vincent; and that night she wrote, and poured forth her heart to him, while Mabel locked herself in her room.

No answer came. Then Mr. Woodrow made inquiries of the officer at the rendezvous, and learned that Captain Lane had gone to Europe with leave of absence for a year; and there her letter followed him. She demanded, as a right, to know the truth. She had given the executors to understand that the debt must be paid, if they had to sell the old homestead to do it. She would be glad to go and live in retirement anywhere.

Not only did she, but so did Mr. Woodrow, receive at last a letter from distant Athens. The widow sobbed and laughed and pressed her letter to her heart, while Woodrow read his with moistened eyes, a suspicious resort to his cambric handkerchief, and an impatient consignment of all such confounded quixotic, unbusinesslike cavalrymen to—to the deuce, by Jupiter; and then he went off to show it to his fellow-executors.

The long summer wore away. Autumn again found mother and daughter and Regy at the dear old home, but light and laughter had not been known within the massive walls since the father's death. The tragedy in Mabel's life, coming so quickly after that event, seemed to have left room for naught but mourning. "She has so aged, so changed," wrote Mrs. Vincent on one of the few occasions when she wrote of her at all to him, and she wrote every month. "I could even say that it has improved her. The old gayety and joyousness are gone, and with them the wilfulness. She thinks more—lives more—for others now."

Winter came again,—the second winter of Mabel's widowhood,—and she was urged to visit the Noels at their distant home; but she seemed reluctant until her mother bade her go. She was still wearing her widow's weeds, and her lovely face was never sweeter in her girlhood days than now in that frame of crape. Of the brief months of her married life they never spoke, but the Noels loved her because of her devotion to him when not a friend was left. In early March the

news from home began to give her uneasiness: "mamma did not seem well," was the explanation, and it was decided that they would go on as far as Washington with her, and spend a day or two there, when Reginald would meet and escort her home.

And so, one bright morning in that most uncertain of months, Mabel Noel with her sister-in-law and that lady's husband stood at the elevator landing, waiting to be taken down to the hall-way of their hotel. Presently the lighted cage came sliding from aloft. Mrs. Lanier entered, followed by the others. Two gentlemen seated on one side removed their hats, and the next instant, before she could take her seat, the lady saw one of them rise, bow, and extend his hand to Mabel, saying, with no little embarrassment and much access of color, something to the effect that this was a great surprise,—a statement which her fair sister-in-law evidently could find no words to contradict, even had she desired so to do. Neither of the two seemed to think of any others who were present. Indeed, there was hardly time to ask or answer questions before they had to step out and give place to people desiring to ascend; and then the gentleman nearly tumbled over a chair in the awkwardness of his adieu. Mrs. Noel's face was averted as they left the hall, but all the more was Mrs. Lanier desirous of questioning:

"Who was your friend, Mabel?"

And Mabel had to turn or be ungracious. Her face was glowing as she answered, simply,—

"Captain Lane."

An hour later Mrs. Lanier said to her husband,—

"That was the man to whom she was said to be engaged before Gordon; and did you see her face?"

Once again they met,—this time at the entrance to the dining-room; and there Captain Lane bowed gravely to "my sister, Mrs. Lanier,—Mr. Lanier," when he was presented. The lady seemed distant and chilling. The man held out his hand and said, "I'm glad to know you, captain. I wish you could dine with us." But Lane had dined, and was going out.

The third day came, and no Reginald. Expecting him every moment, Mabel declined to go with her friends on a shopping-tour, and was seated in her room, thinking, when there came a tap at the door: a card for Mrs. Noel, and the gentleman begged to see her in the parlor. Her color heightened as she read the name. Her heart beat flutteringly as she descended the stairs. He was standing close by the door, but he took her hand and led her to the window at their right.

"You have news—from mamma!" she cried. "Tell me—instantly!"

"Mr. Woodrow thinks it best that you should come, Mrs. Noel; and she has sent for me. Reginald went directly West last night. Will you trust yourself to my care? and can you be ready for the next train?—in two hours?"

Ready! She could go instantly. Was there no train sooner? She implored him to tell if her mother's illness was fatal. He could only say that Mrs. Vincent had been quite suddenly seized; and yet they hoped she would rally. Mabel wept unrestrainedly, upbraiding herself bitterly for her dilatory journey; but she was ready, and had gained

composure when it was time to start. Mrs. Lanier's farewell was somewhat strained, but the captain seemed to notice nothing.

Unobtrusively, yet carefully, he watched over her on the homeward way. Tenderly he lifted her to the pavement of the familiar old dépôt, where Regy met them. Mamma was better, but very feeble. She wanted to see them both.

Three days the gentle spirit lingered. Thrice did the loving woman send for Lane, and, holding his hand in hers, whisper blessing and prayerful charge as to the future. Regy wondered what it could all mean. Mabel, on her knees in her own little room, pleading for her devoted mother's life, knew well how to the very last that mother clung to him, but only vaguely did she reason why.

At last the solemn moment came, and the hush of twilight, the placid, painless close of a pure and gracious life, were broken only by the sobbing of her kneeling children and of the little knot of friends who, dearly loving, were with her at the gate into the new and radiant world beyond.

One soft spring evening a few weeks later Mabel stood by the window in the old library, an open letter in her hand. Twice had she looked at the clock upon the mantel, and it was late when Frederick Lane appeared. Mr. Woodrow had unexpectedly detained him, he explained, but now nothing remained but to say good-by to her. His leave was up. The old troop was waiting for him.

"Will you try to do as I asked you, and write to me once in a while?" he said.

"I will. It was mother's wish." But her head sank lower as she spoke.

"I know," he replied. "For almost a year past she had written regularly to me, and I shall miss it—more than I can say. And now —it is good-by. God bless you, Mabel!"

And still she stood, inert, passive, her eyes downcast, her bosom rapidly rising and falling under its mourning garb. He took her hand and held it lingeringly one minute, then turned slowly away.

At the portière he stopped for one last look. She was still standing there, drooping. The fair head seemed bowing lower and lower, the white hands were clasping nervously.

"Do you know you have not said good-by, Mabel?"

She is bending like the lily now, turning away to hide the rush of tears. Only faintly does he catch the whispered words,—

"Oh! *I cannot!*"

THE END.

"Look, gentlemen, look at this page, one and all, and compel the answer."

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AN ARMY PORTIA.

BY

CHARLES KING,

U. S. ARMY,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "THE DESERTER," "FROM THE RANKS," "DUNRAVEN RANCH," "TWO SOLDIERS," ETC.

"It is, however, proper for me to remark that the rest of the world is entitled to at least one day in the year upon the newspaper men. For three hundred and sixty-five they oracularly direct us in our opinions, walk, and conversation; they give us our politics, our estimates of public men, and our views upon all current questions. The American people are eminently practical, their wits are sharpened in their own affairs, and their thoughts concentrated and intent upon that which immediately interests them. As a result, the larger part of every community have no opinions until they have read their party and religious papers. For a man like myself, who reads them all, the most curious of studies is to gather the reflex of the editor's views in the confident expressions of my friends. Whatever responsibility—and it is great—may rest upon the lawyer with the liberal latitude allowed him under his retainer, upon the preacher with his unrestrained opportunity to speak, upon the teacher in moulding the minds of his students, the largest responsibility of all rests upon the journalist."
—CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW.

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AN ARMY PORTIA.

I.

IT must have been nearly midnight. The lights in the barracks and at the old hospital beyond had long since been extinguished, and only here and there along the row of officers' quarters and at the guard-house, suggestively planted half-way down the slope towards the post trader's store, was there sign of wakeful life. One or two upper windows gave forth a feeble gleam, and there was quite a jovial glow pouring from the open door-way of the colonel's big house across the dark rectangle. It fell upon the tall white flag-staff and displayed it from base to cross-trees, a solitary, ghost-like shaft, and then, with gradually diminishing power, illumined the gravelled pathway that bisected the parade and led from the broad flight of steps in front of the commanding officer's to the major's quarters on the southern side. Overhead the stars were glittering in an absolutely cloudless sky. Not a breath of air was stirring the forest down in the black depths of the valley to the south. Softened by distance, the rush of the river over its rocky bed fell upon the ear like soothing lullaby. Ten minutes earlier the sound of silvery laughter and cheery voices had come floating across the garrison, and half a dozen little groups had strolled away from the colonel's gate, some turning to right and left, others crossing in the broad stream of light from his open portals. One by one the doors of the various quarters had opened to admit their occupants, a few lingering good-nights had been exchanged between gallant young bachelors and some dainty form enwrapped in fleecy burnous, and then even those night-owls "the youngsters" had betaken themselves to their domiciles; one after another doors were closed, lights popped up in the second-floor windows, curtains were drawn, the lights enshrouded, and finally a silence as of solitude spread its mantle over the parade, and the corporal of the guard, leaning against the gate-post at the south-

western entrance, bethought him how expressive was the sign the Indians made for night.

He was of medium height, but an athletic, well-built young fellow, as any one might have seen as the corporal stood under the big lamp at the guard-house but a few moments before. He had a handsome, clear-cut face, with a good deal of soldier bronze about the cheeks and jaws; he wore his natty undress uniform with an easy grace, and carried the long Springfield as though it were a toy. The crossed rifles on his forage-cap, the buckle of his cartridge-belt, even the copper cartridges themselves, gleamed in the lamplight. The chevrons on his sleeve, the narrow stripe along the seam of his trousers, the Berlin gloves he wore, were all spotlessly white; and Corporal Brent was what the men were wont to call "a dandy Jack," though there was not a man in the troop-barracks at the western end of the parade who cared more than once to put on the gloves with the "dandy." Brent had speedily demonstrated the fact that he could outspar any man in the cavalry portion of the garrison, and that only Sergeant Connors, of C company, was able to beat him in a bout. In the little battalion of infantry Brent was a popular man; so, too, had he been in the cavalry command that recently occupied the post; but these fellows of the Eleventh, who had but lately marched in, seemed rather slow to discover his many good traits. Very possibly they did not like the apparent ease with which he had defeated the champions they had so confidently sent against him. Still, it was a good-natured, not vindictive, sort of jealousy,—that soldierly rivalry between the two corps that seems irrepressible and that really does no great harm,—and Brent had begun to win friends among the troopers, who liked the frank, laughing way he had, when an order was suddenly issued by the new post commander the enforcement of which stirred up a row.

As the last visitor left the colonel's gate and he closed his door, thereby shutting out the broad gleam that, almost like that of the headlight of a locomotive, had shot athwart the parade, Corporal Brent was pondering over this very matter.

Colonel Morris was a man who hated irregularity of any kind, and as the grass began to sprout in the spring he noted that it failed to grow along what was evidently a short cut between the southwest gate, the way to town, and the infantry barracks at the eastern end. The former post commander, a cavalryman like himself, had not paid much attention to this sort of thing, and the infantry had grown to look upon the short cut as a sort of thoroughfare sacred to their uses: no officer ever had occasion to go that way. When, therefore, the beaten pathway was ploughed up and re-sodded, and an order was issued that the men must confine themselves to the gravel path or the road-way, there were just a few old foot-soldiers who saw fit to grumble, and some of them, returning late at night from a visit on pass to the neighboring town, made sarcastic allusions to the new order as they trudged homeward under the windows of the officers' quarters on the south side. Others still, trusting to darkness and a theory that all officers should be abed at that hour, proceeded to wear a parallel path, and these two transgressions being occasionally repeated, and the officer of the day

having twice come upon the transgressors without having captured one of their number,—for the "dough-boys" were fleet of foot,—a second order was issued requiring all enlisted men returning to the post between tattoo and reveille to enter their barracks from the rear and not to cross the quadrangle bounded by the fence. There was a road all around in rear of the barracks and quarters, but in the wet spring weather it was often deep with mud and generally dark as Erebus. What wonder, therefore, that many parties still managed to slip in, not exactly in defiance of the order, but because the enlisted men had a fine appreciation of that principle of international law which provides that a mere paper blockade is not entitled to respect? Then it was that the "old man," as the soldiers called the colonel, ordered out his blockaders. An extra sentinel's post was established, a sentry was ordered stationed at the southwest gate from tattoo until reveille, and, as all the cavalry were barracked on the west side near their stables, and as the infantry were manifestly the offenders (so argued the colonel), the three additional sentries required were ordered taken from among their number. This order made guard-duty a trifle harder and the infantrymen a trifle madder. Out of sheer mischief, some of them took to passing up the road between the guard-house and the trader's, entering the northwest gate and stalking across the parade in stealthy column of files from that direction, facetiously decorating their trail with empty beer-bottles, whiskey-flasks, or sardine-boxes, over which the police sergeant spent some time and blasphemy after reveille next morning. Then the colonel ordered the northwest gate locked at tattoo, and the laughing rascals climbed the fence. He would not order out more sentries, but he gave the officer of the day directions to have a patrol in readiness at the flag-staff between eleven and one that night, and then some fine foot-racing resulted, in which the patrol came out second best. The colonel ordered the five infantrymen who happened to be on pass arrested and brought to trial before a garrison court, and the court promptly acquitted every man: it was established that they had all obediently gone around the garrison; they had even taken the trouble to call the attention of the sentry on No. 4 to that fact; and then it dawned upon the commanding officer that some of those infantry scamps were, as they would have expressed it, "putting up a job" at his expense, and that half a dozen of the fleetest-footed among them were, just for a lark, slipping out of quarters after eleven o'clock and around to the northwest gate, vaulting the fence with the agility of monkeys, and then playing the old game of "Tom, Tom, pull away" with his patrol. They had not had so much fun in a year.

Colonel Morris had sense enough to know that if he lost his temper and got to blustering the men would regard it as a victory. He issued no new orders. Suspicion had fallen on a squad of rollicking young Irishmen in Company F, all of whom were members of the battalion base-ball nine. A match game was to come off two days later with the club from Fort Lawrence, and local interest—and bets—were running high. Alas! when the morning of the eventful day came around, four of the fleetest base-runners in the Rifle Nine languished in the

guard-house, arrested at reveille by order of their own captain for absence from quarters at midnight. The colonel had simply let them get out, then ordered check roll-call, with doors barred, and they stood self-exiled. Fancy the consternation among the lovers of the national game! Even the cavalry had backed the local nine against that from Lawrence, and well knew that if substitutes had to be put in there was no earthly chance of their winning. Manifestly, said the battalion, there's no man but Corporal Brent to get us out of the scrape. He was captain and short-stop of the Nine, and on him they rallied forthwith. "Give me your word, men, that there's to be no more of this monkey business, and I'll go to the colonel myself. Refuse, and the game goes to Fort Lawrence, nine to nothing, for we can't play without Lynch and Cooney on the bases." It was a case of unconditional surrender.

The colonel had kindly received the young corporal, had listened to the tale of woe, and sat silently pondering a moment. Then he looked up. "You say the game must go against you without these four men?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Indeed, I would not play without them. We would far better let the game go by default than have the record published, as it assuredly would be, in the army as well as the local papers, with all the errors scored against us. This nine of ours has not been beaten by any team in the department as yet, and it would be an unearned victory for Fort Lawrence."

Colonel Morris sat keenly studying the young soldier's face. He made no answer for a moment, and when he spoke it was of an utterly irrelevant matter:

"Have you not served somewhere under my command before this, corporal?"

The color sprang to Brent's face. There was an instant of hesitation, then a firm but respectful answer:

"Nowhere, sir. I have been in the army only two years, and this is my first station since leaving the depot at David's Island." Then, as though eager to get back to a more pressing matter, "If the colonel will not consider me as proposing a compromise, and will take it as it is meant, I can promise, I think, that there will be no more of this night prowling across the parade, on the part of our men at least."

Morris looked sharply up from under his shaggy brows:

"What do you mean? What men would have any occasion to cross the parade but the infantry?"

"I mean, in all respect, sir, that there may be men or, at least, a man who, having no occasion to cross the parade, will do so simply for the sake of making trouble. In plain words, a cavalryman, sir."

The adjutant, sitting at his desk, dropped his pen and looked quickly up, and the sergeant-major, going out with a bundle of papers, found means to halt at the office door, as though to hear what might follow. Mr. Mason, the adjutant, turned quietly, caught the sergeant-major's eye, and gave a quick but expressive jerk of the head in the direction of the outer room. The sergeant-major took the hint and vanished.

But the clerks had heard the corporal's intimation that some trooper was connected with the transgression for which the ball-playing quartette were confined. The door was immediately closed, leaving them to draw their own inferences and make their own comments. They did not hear the colonel's next remark:

"If any man in the cavalry is guilty in this matter, there is only one whom I can suspect. Can you name him?"

Corporal Brent flushed again, but finally replied, "I beg the colonel not to ask me to answer, when, as I said before, I have no proof whatever."

Colonel Morris turned and pondered a moment. Finally he whirled about in his revolving chair:

"Corporal Brent, if these four men were of my own regiment I would certainly refuse your request. As matters stand, I will not spoil the chances of the Rifle Nine. They will, therefore, be turned over to you to take their part in the game, and to-morrow must stand their trial before the garrison court."

And when Corporal Brent left the office, infinitely rejoiced, the colonel turned to his staff-officer:

"Where do you suppose the recruiting officers picked up a fellow like that? He has the language of an educated man."

"He was enlisted in New York," was the reply, "and I have frequently noted him on guard. They tell me he has more influence over the men in his battalion than any other non-commissioned officer; and I am glad he has promised that there will be no more of this night business."

And yet, two days afterwards, the colonel sent for Corporal Brent to say that the agreement was being violated. Three soldiers had been seen running from the southwest gate across the parade the night before. The sentry had been taken off on the strength of the arrangement; the Rifle Nine had won the game amidst great enthusiasm, and there was a liberal transfer of Treasury notes in consequence. The infantry and many of the cavalrymen were rejoicing in unaccustomed wealth between pay-days, and applications for passes to visit town had been of unusual number. The four culprits had pleaded guilty to their offence and been awarded some light fine. The "dough-boys," fully appreciating the colonel's consideration in the matter, as fully meant to stand by their promise to Brent: it was with not a little feeling, therefore, that they received the news that the compact was violated.

That Saturday evening, in some mysterious way, Corporal Mullen of the guard sprained his wrist just after tattoo; and though Brent was not the next man on the roster, with the adjutant's full consent he appeared armed and equipped at the guard-house and reported for duty as Mullen's successor in charge of the second relief. Examining the list of men absent on pass, he made mental note of two in his own battalion and looked visibly disappointed when he scanned the cavalry names. It had been ordered that all men returning from pass should report at the guard-house, leave their papers with the officer of the guard, and then return to their quarters, those of the infantry battalion passing around outside the officers' houses, those of the cavalry entering their barracks by the rear steps at once.

Three days of sunshine and breeze had dried the ground so that the paths around the post were in perfect order, and, except that it made their walk longer by some two hundred paces, there was no discomfort in obeying the order. The first batch of returning soldiers appeared about half-past eleven, surrendered their passes, and went quietly away to their barracks. Another squad appeared about ten minutes later; but there was still no sign of the two whose names Brent had noted and whose pass expired at midnight. It was then that the young soldier, with the permission of the officer of the guard, strode quickly over to the southwest gate, a hundred yards away.

From here he noted the dispersal of the little party that had been spending the evening at the colonel's; here he had straightened up and, standing under the lamp-post, tendered his soldierly salute to Captain and Mrs. Lane as they passed in front of him, repeating it an instant after when a young lady, with dark, sparkling eyes, looked him quickly over as she tripped by on the arm of her escort; and while the latter held open the gate of the brick quarters at the corner, almost within earshot, she inquired,—

"Who is that infantry corporal, Mr. Hearn?"

"That? Oh, you didn't get here in time for the ball-game, Miss Marshall, or you wouldn't have asked. That's Corporal Brent, captain of the Rifle Nine."

"Can't we persuade you to come in a few minutes, Mr. Hearn?" called Mrs. Lane, in her sweet, cordial voice.

"Yes, do come, Hearn," chimed in the captain, ever ready to second his wife's motion.

The lieutenant hesitated an instant and glanced at the girl who had just stepped within the gate; but, as she said nothing that seemed in any way pressing, he raised his forage-cap, and, pleasantly declining, bade them good-night and went briskly away. Opening her window five minutes later to close the outer blinds, Miss Marshall glanced down from above the piazza roof and saw the corporal of the guard still standing there under the lamp, apparently waiting. He looked quickly up at sound of the creaking shutter, then turned aside. The next moment, before she could fasten the blind, the sentry at the guard-house sung out, "Number One, twelve o'clock." The corporal leaned his rifle against the fence, quickly extinguished the lamp, and all in front of the quarters was darkness.

Down at the guard-house she could see the bleary light of the oil lamp and the dim form of the sentry pacing to and fro; she stood there by the window straining her ears for the watch-call of the distant sentries far over by the haystacks and wood-yard, then nodded her head approvingly at the soldierly ring in the voice of No. 1, as he sung out the final "All's well." Peering through the shutters, she was wondering what had become of the corporal, when the latch of their gate clicked; the rusty hinges gave a sudden squeak; there was a rattle as of a falling rifle, a muttered ejaculation; she could just dimly make out a shadowy form stooping to pick up the gun, and then cautiously reclosing the gate. Then, instead of moving away, there it stood, leaning against the fence. Evidently Corporal Brent had business there

and had come to stay. Instantly she bethought her of the talk she had heard among the officers about the colonel's order prohibiting the men from crossing the parade, of the implied promise that no more violations should occur in recognition of the colonel's having released the quartette of roysterers in time for the great match game, and of the alleged violation of this contract. She was a young woman of quick perception: Brent had evidently posted himself there to capture the malefactors should they appear.

Quarter of an hour passed without the faintest sound from without. She heard Captain Lane extinguishing the lamps in the parlor below, and Mrs. Lane had come tripping up to her door to say good-night, but, seeing that her guest was writing, refrained from coming farther, though Miss Marshall promptly laid aside her pen and diary and cordially bade her enter. All was quiet within and without, and she was just about pulling down the shade, when, peeping through the blinds, she saw the dark shadowy form at the fence move quickly, stealthily into the road. The next moment there came stern, low-toned challenge:

"Halt, you men!"

There was instant scurry and rush; a muttered oath; two shadowy forms darted out by the gate, and, at top speed, their flying footsteps could be dimly heard rushing tiptoe around to the back of the garrison. But there was no pursuit. One man evidently had stood his ground.

"Where are you going?" was Brent's question, in the same low, stern tone.

"To my quarters," was the answer, in accents that were plainly defiant. "Who are you? and what business is it of yours?"

"I am the corporal of the guard, and you are disobeying orders in entering the garrison. Face about and go with me to the guard-house."

"You can't arrest me, by God! I'm going right to my quarters. I'm not going to cross the parade."

"That will do. Face about!" Brent's voice was heard. "You know perfectly well that you disobeyed orders in entering that gate. What's your name?—and your troop?"

"None of your damned business. I'm 'tending to my affairs; you 'tend to yours."

"I am; and I arrest you, whoever you are. Not another word, now, unless you want me to use force."

"Don't you dare lay a hand on me, damn you! I don't recognize your authority. You're not corporal of the guard; I saw who marched on guard this morning, and you were not one of them. Get out of my way, or I'll——" Then came sudden scuffle; an oath; a gasping cry. One man could be heard running with lightning speed to the gloomy outlines of the cavalry barracks, close at hand; another seemed to dash in pursuit. Then came the sound of a stunning blow, the crash of a rifle upon the gravelly road, a heavy fall, a moan. Then—silence.

II.

There was a frown on Colonel Morris's face on Sunday morning that boded ill for officer or man who could not come up to the standard of the post commander on the forthcoming inspection. The old order of things was still in existence, and a beneficent administration had not yet issued its ban against martial exercises of any kind upon the Lord's day. First call for inspection in full dress had "gone," as the soldiers say, as the colonel appeared in the panoply of his profession upon the front piazza, glancing modified approval at the glistening surface of his top-boots and the brilliant polish of his spurs. Down at the front gate his orderly stood, every item of his dress and equipment a model of soldierly trimness. Out in the centre of the parade a little party of the guard had just lowered the storm-flag that had been hoisted at dawn, and were running up in its stead the great garrison standard, whose folds of scarlet and white lapped out lazily in response to the soft breeze now rising from the westward bluffs. Over at the barracks the men had come pouring forth, the neat dark blue and white of the infantry at the east side contrasting favorably with the glaring yellow trimmings of the cavalry battalion, swarming along the walk and streaming from the stairways and galleries of their crowded quarters, like so many full-plumaged hornets. On the verandas across the parade, helmeted officers and ladies in dainty muslins began to appear, and along the row to his right and left the sheltered porches were similarly occupied. But the post commander stood alone. Madame his better half had visitors. Breakfast was not quite finished, and she was devoting herself to their entertainment, knowing well that her liege lord was feeling in no mood for such light duty.

Almost the first thing that the colonel heard on going down-stairs this bright Sunday morning was an animated colloquy in the kitchen between cook and his man-of-all-work, an old darky who had followed the family fortunes for years. Jake had learned from the police-sergeant, while he was at work on the colonel's boots and spurs, that Corporal Brent had been "slugged" by somebody the night before and was now lying unconscious in the hospital. There was time only for very brief investigation before his guests came down. Mr. Wallace was officer of the guard, and, in response to the message brought by the colonel's orderly, had gone at once to his quarters and made his report.

Somewhere about twenty minutes after midnight, the sentry on No. 1 had called Corporal Werner out, saying there appeared to be something wrong up by the gate. Mr. Wallace, knowing Brent to have gone thither, sprang up and went outside, and saw a light being carried rapidly from Captain Lane's quarters, at the corner, over towards the cavalry barracks. Hurrying around in front, he got there just in time to see the captain and the young lady who had recently arrived, Miss Marshall, raising Corporal Brent from the ground. He was bleeding from a jagged gash over the left eye, and was limp and senseless. After having him carried to the hospital and arousing the steward, it was found that his face and eyes were covered with red pepper. Not a word as to his assailants could be learned. The last men to reach

the garrison were Murphy and Scanlan, two scapegraces of Company F. But the sentry on No. 4 declared they had come around by his post on the south side, whereas Brent was lying almost in front of the quarters of C troop, inside the post. Then, again, Scanlan and Murphy were both sober, and neither of them men who would be likely to assault so popular and respected a fellow as Brent. Indeed, both of them stoutly denied having had anything to do with the case. What was more, Miss Marshall had said that she heard the altercation, heard a scuffle, and heard, though she could not see, that the man ran toward the cavalry barracks with the corporal in pursuit; then came the sound of a shock or blow; then the fall, and, hurrying down-stairs, she had called Captain Lane, and, lighting his little hurricane lamp, she had hastened out along the road, the captain rapidly following; and there at the foot of C troop stairway lay Brent, bleeding profusely.

"It was some of our men that did it, sir," said Wallace, regretfully, "and I'd give a month's pay to prove it on them. I'd give more than that if I thought I could prove that no cavalryman had anything to do with it.

Then the colonel had sent his orderly to ask the doctor how Brent was coming on, and the doctor replied that he was still unconscious and he really could not tell how the case would end. It was from this message the orderly had just returned. Old Morris was greatly disturbed. He had purposed having a review of the entire command, cavalry dismounted, and treating his guests to a stirring and martial sight; but when the assembly sounded he had completely changed his mind, and so informed his wife. "I'm all upset about this affair," he said, "and impatient to begin an investigation."

The band was ordered back to quarters; the captains were notified to inspect their companies on their own parades; and, merely exchanging his helmet for forage-cap and laying aside his sabre, the colonel strode over to the office, passing by the three cavalry troops that were nearest him, even cutting across the parade as though to avoid salute, and appeared directly in front of C troop, that was drawn up, in double rank and at open order, farthest to the south side. Lieutenant Hearn, temporarily in command, was engaged in inspecting carbines, but at sight of the regimental commander discontinued his work and raised his hand to the visor of his helmet.

"Go on, go on, Mr. Hearn," said the colonel, gruffly. "I did not mean to interrupt you." Nevertheless, he who had paid no attention to the other companies plainly halted in front of C, and was scanning the men's faces with eyes that were full of gloom. Next he strode around the right of the line, and passed down in front of the rear rank until he reached the centre, where the tallest men were standing, and where he fixed his gaze upon one soldier, a tall, slender, but muscular fellow; he looked him from head to foot, but passed him slowly without one word. A sergeant file-closer noted that the fingers of the soldier's left hand twitched and closed as the colonel approached, and that a lump seemed to rise in the brawny throat, but was quickly gulped down. There was no other symptom, though, and Lieutenant Mason, the adjutant, who had joined his colonel, saw that the man's

eyes never wavered from their look straight to the front, although he might have paled a trifle under that stern, searching gaze.

Half an hour later, inspection being over, the colonel sat in his office, holding an investigation. The captain of C troop was absent on sick-leave at the time, and the command had devolved upon a young officer who had won a fine record in their Arizona days, and who was regarded throughout the regiment as perhaps the most promising of all the subalterns. He was an excellent horseman, a fine tactician, and a drill-master of whom his men had become vastly proud. Under the mild-mannered sway of their captain, a war veteran of uncertain years, C had fallen about to the foot in proficiency in drill and horsemanship. But the moment young Hearn got command they began the turning over of a very new leaf. Little instruction of any kind except mountain-scouting had been imparted in Arizona, but when they came eastward, and old Riggs, their former colonel, made way for a much better soldier, discipline and drill began on the instant. For a few weeks C troop had to take all the raspings, and the men were disheartened as much by the jeers of their comrades as by the sharp raps of their colonel. Hearn, too, was fretting himself half to death; but when his captain was taken ill and was compelled to turn over the troop to his subaltern, the youngster "took hold" in a way that filled Mason's soul with delight, and that speedily enchanted the men. From being the worst, C troop soon challenged all comers for the right to be called the best-drilled troop at the post, and Captain Lane, of D, had cordially congratulated Hearn on the result of his excellent effort. The young fellow had that faculty, in which so many are lacking, of inspiring the men with enthusiasm and interest; and by the time April was ushered in there was nothing the troopers of C would not do for their young commander.

Black sheep, they say, exist in every flock, and while fifty or more of their men swore by their lieutenant, and were proud to serve under him, there were perhaps two soldiers in the troop who seemed to lose no opportunity of defaming him. One of these was a man named Goss, who had long been on extra or daily duty as clerk for the quartermaster, and whose errors at inspection were of such an exasperating character that Mr. Hearn got authority to make him attend drill until he was reported proficient. This, of course, made Goss, who prided himself on his scholarship and superiority to the general run of the men, anything but happy; and in his wrath and discontent he vented his spleen whenever possible to do so at the expense of his young lieutenant. The other man was a tall, dark-eyed, gypsy-looking fellow, whose name was Welsh, and who for several months, off and on, had preferred to be the captain's "striker," or soldier servant,—take care of his horses, black his boots, polish his spurs and sabre, hew wood, draw water, make the fires, sweep the kitchen, run errands, and do all manner of small chores about the house,—than to do soldier duty with his comrades. When the captain closed up his quarters and left the post, taking his family eastward with him, Lieutenant Hearn moved in to look after them for him. This was by the captain's own request; and, having no use for the services of Welsh, he notified that worthy to re-

turn to duty with the troop forthwith. This Welsh bitterly resented. He insisted that the captain had told him before going that he was to stay in charge of his quarters and be excused from all military duty. Hearn replied that there was probably some mistake, but telegraphed to the captain and obtained immediate reply to the effect that he had never given the soldier any such promise, and that he desired that he be now returned to duty with the troop and taught something of the practical duties of a soldier, which he had too long neglected.

Hearn smiled to himself as he read this, thinking whose fault it was that Welsh had been allowed to live in ignorance of much of the drill, and wondering not a little at the change of heart that seemed to have come over the captain, now that he was fairly away. A smart young corporal was detailed to give the two men thorough instruction in the sabre-exercise and the manual of the carbine and pistol, in addition to which Welsh was now required to attend all roll-calls, stable-duty, and drills with the troop, and take his guard tour every fifth day, and a disgusted man he was in consequence.

As the captain's "striker" he had led a life of comparative ease, for that veteran officer had long since outlived any ambition to shine in the service, and looked upon it only as a means of livelihood. At the outbreak of the war old Blauvelt was keeping a country store in Ohio, but dropped his yard-stick and sugar-scoop at the first call for volunteers, fought like a man all through the four years' contest, was wounded, and, having risen to be a major of volunteer infantry, he decided in '66 to stick to soldiering, for at that time it was easy to obtain a commission in the regular service if a man had any Congressional influence or connections at all. When the army was remodelled by the drastic process in 1871, and, as a first lieutenant, he was dropped to the supernumerary list from the regiment of infantry with which he had been serving, Blauvelt decided that he was now too old to begin storekeeping over again, and so he made vigorous effort to be retained in the army, and, together with a few other men who did not know a horse from a hand-saw, was transferred to a vacancy in the cavalry, and there the placid old fellow had been ever since.

Rejoining from the East with a batch of recruits, immediately after the arrival of the regiment from Arizona, Blauvelt had resumed command of C troop, and had given directions that the tall, gypsy-looking fellow, Welsh, who was one of the new-comers, should be put in charge of his horses. Next he moved those veteran quadrupeds from the troop-stables to a little barn in the back yard of his own quarters. Then Welsh himself moved his "kit" from barracks to a little room in the barn, and gradually became an inmate of the captain's household, taking his meals under the captain's roof, performing no duty with the troop, exempted from the authority of the first sergeant, yet spending all his leisure moments in loafing among the company quarters, where he speedily gained the reputation of being surly and insolent to the non-commissioned officers and a mischief-maker among the men. For a recruit who had only recently enlisted, it was surprising how much he knew about the ins and outs of soldier life. Sergeant Wren openly accused him of having been in service somewhere before, and, as he

had no papers to show, he must be either a deserter or a "bobtail."* Welsh angrily denied this, and his ignorance of sabre-drill and certain trooper details seemed to bear him out. "But then," said Wren, "he might have been in the 'dough-boys.'" Welsh avoided the troop quarters for a while after this episode, and was more civil to the sergeants, but right after pay-day he again appeared, eager to try his luck in any game going on. Then it transpired that, if not an expert with saddle and sabre, he was with the cards, and the troopers lost their money to him without exactly understanding how. The first sergeant reported these occurrences to Captain Blauvelt, and the old man seemed greatly vexed. It was established that Welsh had been neglecting the horses while playing his game, but he was not relieved and ordered back to duty with the troop, as had been expected. If anything, he became more insolent in manner to the sergeants than before. The whole affair seemed unaccountable to the other men.

One morning about a month after Welsh's arrival at the post, Lieutenant Hearn came leaping lightly up the steps to make an inspection of the barracks. Corporal Quinn, seeing him approach the quarters, had given word to the men, and those of them who were in shirt-sleeves jumped into their flannel blouses, while others knocked the ashes out of their pipes and put them away. Three or four were seated around a little table playing cards, and among these was the gypsy fellow Welsh, who had been there ever since guard-mount. These men, too, sprang to their bunks and straightened up some items of their "kits," but Welsh still sat at the table, grumbling at the interruption to the game. "Put up those cards, Welsh," said a sergeant, bluntly. "Here comes the lieutenant."

"What do I care?" was the surly answer. "I'm not under his orders. He's got no authority over me."

"Do as I tell you, and be quick about it," was the reply.

"Do it yourself; they ain't my cards. I didn't put them there," answered the man, with an ugly gleam in his black eyes, while he drew from one pocket a piece of chamois-skin and from the other one of the captain's big brass spurs. There was no time for further remark.

"Attention!" came the order from the sergeant who happened to be nearest the door, and the lieutenant entered. Every man on the instant whipped off his cap, and, facing the middle of the long room, stood erect at the foot of his bunk,—every man except one. With his cap on the back of his head, his matted hair hanging down over his eyes, Welsh sat there at the table, coolly polishing the spur.

"Get up there, Welsh!" growled in low, stern tones the first sergeant. "Off with that cap, sir."

For all answer, Welsh cocked his head on one side, and, apparently unmindful of the presence of an officer, became critically and approvingly absorbed in studying the polish which he was imparting to the smooth surface of the spur.

"Did you hear that order? Come to attention, sir!" repeated the sergeant. And the men, astonished at the breach of discipline, looked

* A soldier whose discharge-paper has had the "Character" cut off.

curiously at the recruit, now slowly and scowlingly finding his feet. He had not removed his cap when the lieutenant stood before him.

"Why did you not rise with the other men, Welsh?" asked Mr. Hearn, in a quiet and deliberate tone oddly at variance with his usually quick and snappy manner, and the young officer looked straight into the soldier's eyes as he spoke.

"Didn't suppose I had to," was the sullen reply.

"Why not?"

"Well, Tactics say soldiers actually at work don't have to rise and salute officers."

"And what work were you doing?"

"Work for the captain,—cleaning his spurs."

There was a strange silence in the room. This was a new interpretation, and for a recruit decidedly an original one.

"Where did you learn that idea, Welsh?" asked the lieutenant, still calmly, though his blue eyes began to dilate in a way that indicated how thoroughly he appreciated the man's defiant manner.

"Well, no matter; I learned it."

"You have had a very bad teacher, sir. Take your hand out of that pocket!"

An ugly scowl had settled on Welsh's downcast face. He had stuffed the chamois-skin in his blouse pocket, and still stood there in a slouching attitude, with his cap on the back of his head. Slowly, in obedience to the order, he lowered his hand to the side.

"Now take your cap off!"

One could have heard a pin drop all over the big room.

Forty men stood there in silence, listening breathlessly to this strange and unusual colloquy. Reluctantly, yet overawed by the steady gaze in the blue eyes of the young officer, Welsh's hand went up to the cap, then tossed it angrily some distance away. If he expected rebuke on that score it was not forthcoming.

"Now get your heels together and stand attention."

"You've got no right to order me around like this, Lieutenant Hearn. I'm on duty for the captain, I am,—not for any second lieutenant."

For an instant every nerve and muscle in the officer's athletic frame seemed to quiver. His blue eyes blazed with wrath, and his lips set firmly under the blonde moustache.

There was a moment of death-like silence; a gasp or two among the men. Sergeant Wren's bronzed, weather-beaten face was a picture of amaze and indignation. Welsh himself, as though realizing the insolence of his language and dreading the consequences, had finally assumed the position of a soldier,—so far at least as his heels and legs were concerned; but his head hung forward and his eyes glanced furtively about the room as if in search of sympathy; but there was not a soldier to side with him.

"Take that man under guard," were at last the words that fell from the lieutenant's lips.

A corporal stepped quickly forward. "Come on, Welsh," he muttered, in no gentle tone, and led the scowling trooper from the room.

The lieutenant calmly finished his inspection of the quarters, a red spot burning in each cheek, as he walked around from bunk to bunk. Then, as he turned away and lightly descended the stairs, Sergeant Ross's voice was heard to say, "Rest!" The men looked quickly about at one another. Some of them stretched their arms to full length and gave a long sigh, as though to find relief from the strain. And then little Duffy announced his opinion:

"By gad, fellers, if I'd been the lieutenant, I'd have knocked the top of his d——d head off."

The garrison court which tried Trooper Welsh for insubordinate conduct had found him guilty, despite his statement that according to the Tactics he wasn't required to get up and salute, he being at work. The evidence of the sergeants established the fact that he was playing cards when the lieutenant approached, and that the spur-cleaning was a transparent sham, introduced for the occasion and for evident purpose. But in view of the fact that he claimed to believe that, as the captain's orderly, he was not under the lieutenant's orders, in view of the fact that he had apparently been only ten months in service, and of the further fact that his captain gave him an excellent character and pleaded for clemency for the recruit, the court saw fit to let him off easily with a fine. Mr. Mason, the adjutant, and Mr. Hearn were strongly of the opinion that he ought to be returned to the troop at once and taught his duties as a soldier. But the colonel was away just then; Major Kenyon, of the infantry, was temporarily in command, and he would not disturb old Blauvelt's "striker." Indeed, it seemed as though the troop commander was disposed to resent Hearn's having ordered the man to be confined, though the young officer was actually in command that day, the captain being on sick-report. It is certain, too, that Mrs. Blauvelt made some very acrimonious criticisms of the lieutenant's action, and that the first story in circulation in the garrison was by no means creditable to either his tact or temper. Welsh spent only two days in the guard-house this time, but his language during that brief incarceration was such as to intensify the feeling among the men that he was no novice in garrison affairs. He was loud in his threats against the lieutenant, and full of argument as to the propriety of his conduct.

"I *was* at work, by God! and had 'particular occupation,' to use the language of the Tactics, and you'll find it in paragraph 797, and I wasn't required to rise and uncover. Look at it and you will see for yourselves," he complained.

And it was Sergeant McKenna, of the infantry, who retorted,—

"And where did you—a cavalryman—learn the numbers of the paragraphs in infantry tactics, Welsh? And while you were about it, why didn't you learn paragraph 803 as well? that's the one that covers your case, me buck, and, begad! if I'd been there you'd 'a' dropped that spur-r and got on your feet d——d quick, or I'd 'a' jerked the backbone out of yees. Where did you learn your infantry tactics, I say?"

And here Welsh could only redden with mingled wrath and confusion. From this time on the impression gained ground that he was

a deserter from some foot regiment, and one who had again enlisted in the army, but under an assumed name.

Within the week after Captain Blauvelt's departure Trooper Welsh was twice again confined and brought before a garrison court. He had accompanied the captain's family to the train, and, carrying Mrs. Blauvelt's numerous bags and baskets into the sleeper, was borne away, apparently unavoidably. The conductor wired back that he had safely landed him at Barclay, a thriving little town ten miles to the east, and that he had abundant means to buy his ticket back; but he was gone forty-eight hours, and at the expiration of that time was dumped in a dishevelled condition at the post by the town marshal, with the information that if it had not been for the crossed sabres on his cap he would have had him in the county jail for drunken and disorderly conduct and resistance to the officers of the law. "Where does he get his money?" asked that official. "He smashed about twenty dollars' worth of glass windows, and paid all fines, costs, and damages, and yet had some ten dollars to spare." The men in C troop could have told where he got his money, but, as that was won in gambling, nothing was said, by them, about it. Welsh was tried for absence without leave, and coolly pleaded that he had been carried away while serving his captain and was then detained by the civil authorities. Lieutenant Hearn, however, testified that he, who carried one of the children aboard, had ample time to get off, and that Welsh preceded him in getting on the train. The town marshal testified that Welsh was drunk around the village for thirty-six hours, but that nobody interfered with him until his conduct became so outrageous that he was compelled to arrest him. Welsh, therefore, was sentenced to a fine of five dollars and to ten days in the guard-house, simply for absence without leave, attending all drills and stable-duty. Three days later, while he was grooming one of Captain Blauvelt's horses at the picket-line, Lieutenant Hearn's spirited little bay, which happened to be next him playing with the trumpeter's steed across the line, suddenly switched around with his powerful haunches and knocked Welsh's curry-comb out of his hand. The gypsy fellow straightened up, glanced quickly about him, saw that the lieutenant's back was turned, and then, with a vicious gleam in his piercing eyes, drew back his heavily-booted right foot and with all his force kicked the young bay in the stomach. Keogh plunged madly with the sudden pain, and in an instant little Dooley, who was grooming the lieutenant's horse, had thrown down curry-comb and brush and smote the gypsy under the eye, knocking him up against the captain's bulky and placid charger. In another instant, too, Sergeant Wren leaped in and separated the men, Welsh wild with fury, Dooley dancing about in a glow of righteous wrath.

Hearing the noise, the lieutenant sprang to the scene. "Silence, both of you!" he ordered. "What does this mean, sergeant?"

"He struck me, the infernal little cur, and I'll kill——"

"Not a word more from you, Welsh. What made you strike him, Dooley?"

"Look at Keogh's belly, sir," almost sobbed the little Irishman in his rage and grief. "See where he kicked him."

Sure enough, there on the glistening coat an ugly lump was rising and a jagged groove plainly showed where the cruel boot had struck, while Keogh still quivered and trembled. For a moment young Hearn was too angry to trust himself to speak. He stood there with his eyes fairly blazing. At last he turned to the sergeant:

"This man has been frequently cautioned never to strike or kick a horse, I suppose?"

"Every man in the troop has, sir, time and again."

Hearn slowly turned upon the scowling soldier: "It would serve you but right if I kicked you as you have kicked that horse. Brutality of that kind cannot be tolerated here, sir, and you will stand your trial for it. Take him back to the guard-house, sergeant."

"I kicked him because he kicked me," growled Welsh.

"It's a lie, sir," cried Dooley, bursting in. "Sure the horse was just playing, like, and never touched him at all."

"Never mind, Dooley: your evidence will be called for when it is wanted."

"By God! if I'm to be punished for hitting a horse, what's to be done with him for striking a man, I want to know?" exclaimed Welsh, as with a curse he hurled his curry-comb to the ground.

"Come on, you blackguard," muttered Sergeant Wren, as he collared the man. "You can thank God I didn't see you do it. I'd l'arn you never to kick a horse."

It was this affair which led to Welsh's third court-martial in less than a month. And it was Welsh now whom Colonel Morris believed to have been the assailant of Corporal Brent the night before, and the instigator, as well, of more or less of the mischief that had been going on. It was Welsh whom Mr. Hearn more than half suspected. It was Welsh whom Sergeant Wren himself had openly accused when the troop came back from stables Sunday morning. But when Wren was called into the colonel's presence at the office, and asked what he knew, he was compelled to say it could not have been Welsh at all.

"What are your reasons, sergeant?" asked the colonel. And the eyes of the group of officers were fixed on the veteran trooper who stood so sturdily and respectfully before them.

"Because I went through the quarters just after tattoo last night to see how the men had been cleaning up for to-day. Their boots had all been carefully blacked, except the stable-boots, and set at the foot of the bunks, and their blouses and trousers, except the ones they had on, were brushed and folded on their boxes. I took particular note of Welsh's, for he was stubborn about cleaning his things; and about Goss's, too, for Goss has been surly ever since he was made to drill and attend inspection. Sergeant Ross says no man passed through the door before he went to sleep; but any man who wanted to could slip out of a window in his stocking-feet and go down the rear stairway, and then run down to Mulligan's place just outside the reservation and get what liquor he wanted, and come back the same way. I was one of the first, sir, to get dressed to go out after Corporal Brent was hurt. The other corporal of the guard came into my room to get my lantern, and just as soon as they had carried Brent to the hospital I ran up-stairs and made

an inspection. Welsh was there in his bunk, undressed, and apparently asleep. His boots and clothes hadn't been touched. Goss was in his underclothing, half awake. There were his boots covered with dust, and in places still damp with dew. There were the trousers that had been folded, lying loosely across the box. Goss swore that he hadn't been out at all, but I pointed to his boots and trousers, and when the man started up, as though in surprise, to look at them, a pint-flask half filled with whiskey slid from under his pillow." But this was not all, said Wren. Scanlan and Murphy had admitted being joined by a trooper as they came up past the stables. He joined them again after they had reported at the guard-house, a trifle late, had given them a drink of whiskey from his flask, told them the coast was clear and they might just as well slip through the gate and run across the parade: what was the odds, so long as no one knew it? But the instant they heard Corporal Brent's voice, they started and ran until behind the officers' quarters, and then they noted that their cavalry acquaintance had stayed behind. They did not know his name at all,—could not describe him, for it was too dark: all they knew was that he was tall and had a thick, bushy beard. Welsh's face, except the black moustache, was always clean shaved: not so, however, with Goss. He wore a full beard.

At noon on Sunday, therefore, Trooper Goss was behind the bars, awaiting the result of Corporal Brent's injuries. When searched at the guard-house, and his pockets were turned inside out, the corporal of the guard began to sneeze; and then it was discovered that some tiny, tawny-colored particles sticking about the seam were grains of Cayenne pepper, a small packet of which, half empty, was found lying in the road-way, midway between the quarters and the southwest gate.

III.

It was a lovely May morning, and a warm south wind was blowing through the open windows of Captain Lane's cosey quarters and billowing the dainty curtains of the breakfast-room. Down in the westward valley, close under the bluffs, a white mist was creeping upward from the shallows of the stream, and here and there among the furrows of the company gardens, and along the railway-embankment, little wisps of fog hovered over the soaking earth. It had rained in torrents during the night, but Nature emerged from her bath glowing in the rays of a sunrise that the officer of the day pronounced simply gorgeous, as he turned out for reveille. A man less joyous-hearted than Captain Lane might have found much to delight him in such a radiant morning. But those sunrises were old stories to this particular trooper, and though there was hardly a State or Territory west of the Missouri in which he had not turned out with the lark and welcomed in the new-born day, he seemed just as keen a worshipper of the sun-god as in the buoyancy of his boyish days, when, nearly a score of years before, he had first joined the Eleventh Cavalry. He was a man honored and esteemed in his profession. He was well-to-do in the world, thanks to the prudence and frugality of his subaltern days. He had hardly a

care in the world. He had charming quarters, had a charming station, and he was wedded only during the year before to a woman whom he devotedly loved, and who believed that the world had never contained a man so true and tender and noble as he. A very lovely woman was Mrs. Lane, and a very sweet and winning hostess she made when doing the honors of her army home. There were those, to be sure, who could detect a species of nervousness and a vague anxiety in her manner at times, and there were people—there always are, worse luck!—who could not quite forgive her her present happiness, or excuse it in her that, after having been wooed and won by, and wedded to, the Adonis of the regiment some few years before, she had again wedded, and this time the most eligible bachelor in the command, not much more than two years after the not untimely taking off of her first husband. "No woman ought to be allowed more than one choice out of a regiment," was the half-laughing, half-rueful remark of some of the army wives who had sisters yet unchosen. They thought Mrs. Lane had rather too much good luck, despite the fact, now well and generally known, that her first marriage was a brief story of sudden disenchantment, of woe and wretchedness, of shame and sorrow unspeakable. Except among the women, the name of her first husband was rarely spoken in the Eleventh; but, unworthy though he was, there were not lacking censors of her own sex to point out time and again how impossible it would have been for them, had they lost a husband in the army, ever to think of taking another in the same regiment, especially when it was known that No. 2 had been in love with her before she met the original conqueror of her maiden heart. That these remarks should in various forms come eventually to her ears one can hardly doubt; and that a cloud should at times overspread the tranquil sky of her sweet home life, no one who knew Mabel Vincent in her school-days could fail to understand. No one at the post, except her own loyal husband, dreamed of the tears she shed over remarks that, wilfully or witlessly, were repeated to her. He strove earnestly to soothe and comfort her. He redoubled his devoted and thoughtful attentions. Women at the fort simply raved over the lover-like ways of Captain Lane to his own wife, and never tired of pointing out to their respective lords and masters how tender and watchful he was. What charming little presents he was always bringing her! "Where did he get such exquisite violets, —such lovely carnations?" "Did you ever see anything sweeter than that locket he gave her last week? It was an anniversary of some kind. She blushed when I asked her, but wouldn't tell what. He's always finding excuses for giving her something," etc. And finally some of his brother Benedicks had come to him with gloomy faces to say that if he didn't "let up on this sort of thing" they would have to quit the regiment and the service: life was getting to be all one invidious comparison between his loveliness as a husband and their own individual shortcomings in that capacity.

Several months had been spent abroad by Captain and Mrs. Lane after the quiet wedding which united them, and then, joining the regiment at the fort on its return from the Arizona tour, they speedily settled in their army home. For a while the delights of fitting up the

quarters with all the beautiful rugs, curtains, pictures, books, and bric-à-brac they had brought from the East kept Mrs. Lane so busily occupied that she had no time to think of possible criticisms. But it was not long before the captain saw that the cloud he dreaded was settling on her sweet and winsome face. He did not need to ask what had been said to her: he could conjecture what that was full well.

Taking her to his strong heart, he had kissed away the brimming tears, saying, "Something has been said to worry and annoy you, dear one. I do not ask you to tell me; but remember what I have always said: in nine cases out of ten, remarks about people sound very differently when repeated by women—and by a good many men, too—than when originally spoken."

Long years of garrison life had taught him that in the almost endless little tiffs and jealousies among the women, and the occasional misunderstandings among the men, people rushed to confide their side of the story and pour forth their grievances into the ears of next-door neighbors, with whom, as likely as not, they became in turn embroiled within the year, while the quarrel with the original object of their wrath had been long since forgotten. His own policy had been to give every man his ear, but none his voice, when personal matters were under discussion. But he knew well that it would be expecting too much of most women that they should simply listen and not tell. There were admirable and truthful wives and mothers in the little coterie, whose friendship he could have coveted for his wife; but one of the odd features of frontier life is that the impulsive rush for the intimate friendship of the newly-arrived army bride is generally made by those who are most apt to betray her confidence when won, and to give her unfavorable impressions, "absolutely without having said one word against them," of the very ones whose stability of character makes them most desirable as friends and neighbors. Lane noted that the women he most liked and respected were the ones whom she was making visible efforts to regard as he did. Perhaps had he painted them in less glowing colors before she had seen for herself, a very different result might have been reached; for if a man really wants his wife to like another woman whom she has not yet met, the less he says of her perfections the better. Wisely Lane made no attempt to control her opinions, but, as his duties kept him away from the house much of the day, and as there was every prospect of the entire battalion being sent on a long practice-march during the summer, he was a trifle at a loss what companionship to provide for her during the inevitable separation. It was with genuine rejoicing, therefore, that he read one day soon after their arrival a letter from her brother which she silently handed him, and then sat watching his face as he conned its three pages.

The captain finally laid it down and looked across the table, a kind light in his gray eyes. "You want to do something for her, don't you, Mabel?" he smilingly asked.

"Indeed, Fred, I wish I could. She has had such hard fortune, and she is such a true girl. It is cruel to think of her now without a home, and, as Regy says, without a chance of employment. I know

the Woodrows would have been so glad to take her abroad with them as companion, but it's too late for that."

"Regy doesn't say why she left Mrs. Withers, but I fancy I can conjecture," said Lane. "It was there I first met her, at a dinner-party one evening,—when I wanted to be with you."

"And yet were abundantly consoled, as I have heard you say more than once, sir. Oh, she has told me all about it, too. Indeed, if I weren't disposed to be mortally jealous of her wit and wisdom, do you know what I'd do?"

"How can I divine, your ladyship?" asks Lane, his eyes twinkling.

"I'd write and bid her come here to us, and I'd marry her to the nicest fellow in the Eleventh forthwith. Oh, you shouldn't see anything of her, sir. I'd take good care of that. But," with sudden change of tone and manner, "wouldn't it be lovely, Fred?"

"Wouldn't what be lovely?" this profound dissembler asks, though he knows exactly what she is thinking.

"Why, to have her come and live with us and marry in the regiment."

"She isn't very pretty," said the captain, doubtfully, but with the tact of a Talleyrand. "The boys might not admire her when Mrs. Lane was alongside."

"Now, Fred!" exclaims Mistress Mabel, provoked and pleased at once. "You know her eyes are glorious."

"Hum! Passably—when animated."

"When *isn't* she animated? She always enters into everything so heartily. She's so full of fun and life. Why, she would make the ideal army wife, Fred. That girl can do anything."

"Then why condemn her to marrying in the army, Mabel?"

But this question Madame declines to answer. She comes quickly around the table, and, with her arms about his neck, nestles her soft cheek against his bronzed and weather-beaten jowl, burrows under the heavy moustache with her rosy lips, and kisses him lovingly.

"Say I may, Fred," she whispers, coaxingly.

"You may, a dozen times over. I think I rather like it," he laughs, his eyes beaming with delight.

"You stupid boy!" She is shaking him now. "Say I may write and tell her to come right away. Reginald can bring her as far as Kansas City as well as not."

"She'll spoil our *tête-à-têtes*."

"She won't. She'll be having her own before she is here a week. Besides, you're getting tired of them already." She says this, of course, to be contradicted, and is promptly gratified.

The trumpet is sounding "first call," and the captain is compelled to go. "Do as you like, my darling," he gladly answers. "Any friend of yours is welcome; and—I think you might tell her that passes from St. Louis will be forthcoming."

And now, barely two weeks later, Georgia Marshall, for the second time in her life, finds herself an inmate of an army garrison and living a blithe and restful life after years of thankless toil. She was not

originally one of Mrs. Lane's intimates in the home of their girlhood. They had known each other as children, had gone to dancing-school together, but Mabel Vincent's "set" was made up mainly from the young people whose parents were wealthy, and Miss Marshall's father had had to struggle hard for the wherewithal to "keep the wolf from the door." She was only seventeen when compelled to shift for herself. Her mother had been taken from her years before. She had been a loving and devoted daughter to her sad-faced father, and had comforted and blessed the humble home to which he had been forced to retire after some disaster which involved all his savings. And here she worked and studied; and here she gave herself up to the task of cheering his declining years until the feeble thread of his weary life snapped suddenly asunder and she was alone. For a few months she found a home in the army in the household of a relative stationed at the barracks near at hand. But, being determined to launch out for herself, she had sought the position of teacher to the younger children of a wealthy manufacturer and of companion to his wife. This she had held for a few years, sorely tried at times, yet never complaining. She had ample opportunity, at least, to read, to study, and to estimate character. Indeed, it was her keen perceptions that brought about the final rupture between herself and the wife of her employer, herself a distant connection. It was in the days of an early widowhood that Mrs. Lane found herself so frequently in Miss Marshall's company. During the winter the young widow had spent in the South her mother's health was failing, and between the invalid and Miss Marshall there had sprung up a friendship and intimacy for which the daughter at the time could hardly account. But when letter after letter came, telling how the girl managed to run over almost every day and spend an hour or two reading aloud, and then when Mrs. Vincent began to intrust much of her correspondence to these willing hands, Mabel had learned to understand how unselfish was her devotion; and after her mother's death there arose between these two young women—the one widowed, yet cherishing a new-born love, the other a wage-worker and fancy free—a firm friendship which gained strength with every month. It was to Georgia Marshall that Mabel, sobbing with emotion, had first confided the news of her engagement to Captain Lane, and was amazed, yet rejoiced, at the fervor with which her friend had received the tidings. "At last!" she cried. "Oh, I am so thankful! He has loved you so truly,—so long!"

And so, when from brother Reginald's letter Mrs. Lane read the story of Georgia Marshall's final difference with her employers, no time was lost in demanding that she should come to their army home for what Mabel termed a good long rest. She was determined that Georgia should have just as good a time, just as much attention, just as many devotees, as any girl that ever turned the heads of the bachelors of the Eleventh. For the week preceding the young lady's arrival she had been impulsively preparing the young fellows for Georgia's coming and sounding her praises to many a listening ear. Who would not listen to those pretty lips? And therefore there was distinct sense of disappointment among the subalterns when that much-lauded damsel

stepped from the train at the little station and was rapturously enfolded to Mabel's heart. Jim Wallace, who was Hearn's especial chum, and "Lazy" Lee, declared that the new arrival was plain as a pipe-stem, except that her hands and feet were particularly slender and shapely. And Mr. Martin, something of a connoisseur, declared that her eyes were the only redeeming feature of her face. But these gentlemen had seen her only at the station the afternoon of her arrival after a dusty ride; and Hearn himself, being officer of the guard, was not presented until the following day. That evening, however, he was her escort to the little gathering at the colonel's, and was far from content that she did not second the cordial invitation extended by Captain and Mrs. Lane to come in and chat awhile.

But now, three days after her advent, as she comes down to the pretty breakfast-room, drinking in the soft balmy air that floats through the open window, Georgia Marshall's face is by no means plain. Her eyes are deep, dark, full of intelligence and life. Her mouth is large, but the teeth are pearly white and beautifully regular. The instant she speaks or smiles there is transfiguration in her looks, and her manner is all unaffected grace and gladness. Mabel raises her sweet face to meet the warm good-morning kiss. The captain lays down the letter he is conning over, and the perplexed expression vanishes, as he cordially greets her:

"Well, and how did the heroine of Fort Ryan rest last night?"

For every one, it seems, is talking of her pluck and promptitude,—of the oddity of the thing that she, a new arrival, should have been the only one to hear the brief colloquy between that unknown ruffian and the corporal of the guard, that she should have been the first to reach and succor the still senseless soldier, Brent.

IV.

Out along the grassy slopes the liveliest of trumpet-calls were ringing. Long lines of mounted skirmishers were advancing in mimic attack against the bluffs to the north of the wide valley. Assembly and deploy, rally and charge, followed each other in quick succession, and the piff-paff of carbines far out on the eastern flank was answered by sweeping dash of whirling sabres and thunder of galloping hoofs. Here and there the bright hues of the guidons lent color to the sombre effect of service dress and treeless prairie. And along the bold crests that spanned the northern sky-line groups of gayly-attired spectators, where parasol and fan, scarf and handkerchief, seemed fluttering in constant motion, watched the busy scene on the flats below. Several buggies and carry-alls had driven out from the neighboring town; three or four ambulances and Concord wagons were present from the post itself; and one light open barouche, drawn by two stylish bays and driven by a dignified negro, was evidently a centre of attraction for many eyes. Herein were seated Mrs. Lane and her guest, Miss Marshall, with their near neighbors, the wife and sister of Mr. Wharton, first lieutenant of Lane's troop. Several ladies from the fort had alighted from their various vehicles and were gathered in lively con-

versation about the barouche. Others, seated along the crest, were watching the evolutions, and commenting, as is their wont, on the horsemanship or voice of this officer or that. Every now and then some town buggy would drive close beside the one stylish-looking carriage, and its occupants would gaze with much curiosity upon the party therein. As a rule, these gazers were women, possibly friends of some of the post people, and this was not a matter to be much objected to. But one buggy, drawn by a gray horse, contained two men whose appearance Miss Marshall's keen eyes had noted as they passed the first time and closely scrutinized as they came down the next. One was flashy in dress; both were loud in their talk and swaggering in manner; both were smoking cigars of questionable origin, and one of them had the unmistakable cut of the German Jew. Any one could "place" him, even had he maintained silence, while, on the other hand, his coarse tones would in the blackest darkness have proclaimed his class. Both times they passed they stared boldly at the occupants of the carriage and critically inspected the team and appointments,—the second time driving close alongside and perceptibly slackening up to have a better look. Mrs. Lane flushed under such bold scrutiny, and the other ladies looked embarrassed and annoyed.

"Ugh! those horrid men!" spoke Mrs. Morris, the colonel's wife, who drove up just in time to catch a whiff of malodorous smoke. "Who are they? and what are they doing here?"

"One is a Mr. Schönberg," answered Mrs. Brodie, of the infantry. "He used to be a clerk here at the post trader's several years ago, I am told; but he has his own store in town now, and they say he's an awful cheat; no one will deal with him,—from the post at least. I don't know the other man at all. He is a stranger."

"They are particularly rude in manner, it seems to me," said Mrs. Morris. "I wish the colonel would keep such people away from the reservation."

"That man likes to be impudent, Captain Brodie says. He was put off the reservation some years ago and ordered never to come on again. He was caught smuggling liquor to the men, and had been for months lending them money at scandalous interest, and every one knew, and knows now, that he has the worst kind of influence on them. Indeed, Mrs. Morris, I wish the colonel would keep him out, although I suppose some of the men—the most vicious among them—would go to his place in town whenever they wanted money or liquor. He probably ventures out here because the Eleventh has just come to the garrison and he supposes Colonel Morris to be in ignorance of his character and of the orders that had been given by his predecessor. Major Kenyon knows him well enough; and the colonel of the —th Cavalry gave strict orders that he should not be allowed even to cross the bridge. But then none of your regiment know him, I suppose."

"Mr. Hearn knows him, Mrs. Brodie," promptly spoke a young lady who wore not inconspicuously the gold crossed rifles of the infantry.

"Why, how can that be, when he has been here no longer than the other officers of the Eleventh?" was the immediate reply.

"He was stationed here the winter following his graduation. He was still an additional second lieutenant then. You remember he did not get his promotion to the Eleventh until nearly a year after he left the Point. At least that is what Mr. McDonough says." And, Mr. McDonough being the owner of the crossed rifles, the damsel blushes becomingly.

"Oh, I remember," answered Mrs. Morris. "Mr. Hearn told us he had been stationed here for one winter; but he didn't seem to like it much then."

"Wasn't Mr. Hearn a little wild in those days?" inquired Mrs. Brodie. "It seems to me I have heard as much from some of the towns-people. You've no idea what gossips they are. Why, I've learned ever so much about your predecessors, the —th, that I never dreamed of before they left. A good deal about Mr. Hearn, too." And the lady looks tentatively at Mrs. Lane, as though inviting further question. But, glancing an instant from that young matron's flushing face, she finds Miss Marshall's big dark eyes fixed upon her with a scrutinizing, penetrating expression that in some way disheartens her. "I beg pardon, though," she hastens to say: "I think I have heard Mr. Hearn and Captain Lane were particular friends. Of course all this happened long ago, and he has probably outlived his youthful propensities."

"I never heard of Mr. Hearn as anything but a most dutiful and excellent officer," said Mrs. Lane, quietly. "Captain Lane is very fond of him."

"Certainly, if he had been a dissipated man, or a gambler, or—anything else," says Mrs. Morris, with proper spirit, "my husband would have been apt to know it; but——"

"Oh, it wasn't that," interposed Mrs. Brodie. And just at this instant three or four officers came cantering up the slope, taking advantage of a brief rest to pay their *devoirs* to the fair spectators.

Miss Marshall noted that, as this group approached, the buggy with its objectionable occupants drove slowly away in the direction of the fort. Half an hour later, as they were bowling rapidly homeward over the hard prairie road, they came upon the infantry battalion, also skirmishing. Everybody but the guard seemed out at drill, and the post was practically deserted. Entering the garrison limits, Cassius, the colored coachman, guided his bays down the slope between the guard-house and the post trader's store and then up the incline to the southwest gate, preferring this road to going along the garrison in front of the barracks of the men. The ladies were chatting blithely, but both Miss Marshall and Miss Wharton noted that the buggy with the gray horse was halted at the store railing, and at the door stood the two men in civilian dress and a third in the undress uniform of the cavalry. All three stared intently at the occupants of the barouche with that singular expression of mingled impudence and familiarity which is so marked a characteristic of the street loafers always hanging about the corners of certain thoroughfares of our Western cities where the police are not yet instructed in those rules of civilization which require such parties to be moving on. As the ladies were whirled by,

Mr. Schönberg was seen to wink expressively, and the soldier, a dark-faced, beetle-browed fellow, with his hands in his pockets, looked after them and grinned.

"How annoyed Mr. Hearn would be," said Miss Wharton, "if he could have seen that performance!"

"What do you mean, Lucy? Those horrid men again?" asked her sister, who, being on the back seat with Mrs. Lane, had not seen the soldier's face after they passed him by.

"The men are impertinent, certainly; one expects nothing better of that class of people; but all the soldiers are so respectful and courteous to our ladies, generally, it is a pleasure to meet them. Haven't you noticed how different they are from—well, from that one, Miss Marshall?"

"Yes, indeed, not only here, but in the old artillery barracks where I once visited. I am sure Mrs. Curtis, my cousin, knew the name of every man in the two batteries, and always had a pleasant word for them when we met. They always took off their caps, though some of the old sergeants, to be sure, saluted just as they would to an officer. This man was a contrast to the general rule."

"Perhaps he is not of our regiment," suggested Mrs. Lane, "and does not know the ladies."

"Unluckily he *is* of 'ours,'" said Mrs. Wharton. "That is Welsh, of C troop, and he was Captain Blauvelt's 'striker.' Mr. Wharton says he is a bad character, and that there was something very strange about the way the captain kept him by him all the time he was here. Why isn't he at drill, I wonder?"

"Possibly he's on guard," said Mrs. Lane. "The guard-house is only a stone's-throw away."

"He's never far from the guard-house," laughed Mrs. Wharton, as she sprang from the carriage at the Lanes' gate. "But he's not on guard to-day, unless he has taken off his belts. There! they have gone in to the bar. How I wish the colonel would close that place!"

Half an hour later, all in a glow after their rapid drill, four or five young officers strode, laughing and chatting, into the club-room at the store, and, throwing off belts, caps, and gauntlets, proceeded to bury their moustaches in the foaming glasses of cool beer which the attendant promptly supplied. Over on the other side of the establishment loud voices could be heard in animated talk, and presently Lieutenant Lee called out to the attendant to close the door leading over into the bar. Mr. Stone, the trader, entered at the moment, looking a trifle vexed.

"Those men are making quite a racket in there, Stone. Who are they?" asked the lieutenant.

"A couple of fellows from town, and Welsh, of C troop."

"Welsh!" exclaimed Mr. Hearn, who was glancing over the pages of a late paper. "Why, he has no business here! That man is on sick-report, under the doctor's care. Has he been drinking?"

"They've all been drinking, more or less. If I had known Welsh was on sick-report I would have told Billy not to sell him anything."

"Why, that man was told that he must stay in quarters all the time the command was at drill. It's a rule in the troop when a man

is excused from any duty he must remain in quarters during the performance of it. Just tell him to step outside," said the lieutenant. "Say I wish to see him." And, picking up his cap and gauntlets, Mr. Hearn strolled from the room and went around to the east front. There, through the open door-way, the conversation within became distinctly audible, and Captain Brodie, of the infantry, who was officer of the day, returning from his morning inspection of the sentries down about the wood-yards, hearing the loud talk, turned and came rapidly over towards the store.

"Who do you say wants me?" Welsh's voice was heard to ask, as he stood unsteadily at the bar.

"The lieutenant,—Lieutenant Hearn, man: he's waiting for you outside," said the bar-tender, in tones that plainly told his anxiety.

"He be d——d! I ain't under his orders. I'm on sick-report. The post surgeon is the only man who can give me orders to-day, and don't you forget it."

"Go instantly, Welsh, or I'll call for the guard," said Mr. Stone. "You're more than half drunk now.—Don't give that man another drop, Kirby.—Go at once, Welsh." And now Lieutenant Hearn's erect figure appeared at the door-way.

"Welsh, come here," was all he said.

Slowly and with surly mien the soldier turned, glowering at his superior, set down the glass, and then slouched across the floor toward the young officer, but halted short of the door-way.

"Come out here, sir," said the lieutenant, sternly, stepping a little to one side.

"What for? I ain't on duty to-day," was the sullen answer.

"No arguments, Welsh. We've had too much of that from you. Go instantly to your quarters, and stay there. You got excused from drill on account of illness, and you know perfectly well the troop rule. You have no business to leave the barracks, much less to be drinking here."

"The doctor didn't give me any such orders," muttered Welsh, still hanging back, "and he's my commanding officer to-day."

For all answer Mr. Hearn sprang quickly forward, grasped the coat-collar of the soldier in a muscular hand, and, without violence, but with quick determination, marched him forth into the sunshine.

"By G—d, lieutenant, you'll pay for this!" screamed Welsh. "I don't allow any man to lay hands on me." And then, the instant he was released, he turned and shook his clinched fist at his young superior. Before another word could be said, the corporal of the guard with a couple of men, answering the signal of the officer of the day, came bounding to the spot.

"Take that man to the guard-house," said Captain Brodie, boiling over with indignation.—"I'll attend to this case, Mr. Hearn. I witnessed the whole thing."

And, swearing and struggling in the grasp of the guard, Welsh was led away. Brodie saw him safely landed in the guard-room, then turned back to the store. The two civilians, who had silently witnessed this scene, were exchanging significant glances from time to time, and

some low-whispered words. "His name's Brodie," Schönberg was heard to say. "You've got Hearn." But when the officer of the day reappeared at the door-way they turned their backs and were apparently absorbed in the discussion of the cocktails which the barkeeper somewhat grudgingly set before them. Brodie took a good look at the pair, but, as they carefully refrained from showing their faces, he remained but a moment at the door-way, and then, with a dissatisfied shake of the head, turned and walked over toward the garrison.

The trumpet was loudly pealing orderly call a few minutes later as the men came marching up from stables, their sabres clanking and their spurred heels ringing along the road. The instant the ranks were broken in front of the barracks a rush was made by dozens of their number for the cool refreshment of the trader's beer, and the bar was speedily crowded with their stalwart, dust-covered forms and ringing with their jovial voices. Some of them looked askance at the strangers, but Schönberg assumed an air of joyous good-fellowship.

"Just in time, boys," he called aloud. "Come right up and have it with me. Here, Billy, ask all these gentlemen to take a glass of beer. I always swore by the cavalry, anyhow: didn't I, Billy? That's right, boys: fill 'em all up; and when you get into town come around and see my place." And with that he began distributing printed business-cards among them.

Some of the men accepted the cards and the proffered hospitality; others seemed to hang back. One or two non-commissioned officers drew away to one side by themselves and signalled to the barkeeper that they wished to be served privately and not included in the Israelite's treat.

Meantime, Captain Brodie had gone in search of the commanding officer. The roll of the drum and the peal of the trumpet sounding mess-call speedily emptied the bar of the blue-bloused throng. But Mr. Schönberg and his companion had been drinking just enough to be aggressively hospitable. The next thing that Kirby knew, the former was lurching around the building with his friend in tow, and, to his consternation, made as straight as his legs would permit for the door of the officers' club-room. Three or four of the young gentlemen were still there, sipping "shandygaff" and glancing through the papers. These looked up in evident surprise at the flushed features and flashy attire of the stranger who so confidently and jovially entered, his companion following closely in his wake.

"G'mornin', gen'lem'n," exclaimed Mr. Schönberg, holding forth a pudgy hand and beaming effusively upon Lieutenant Lee. "Welcome to Fort Ryan, gen'lem'n. Permit me to 'ntr'duce m'self: Mr. Levi Schönberg; 'n thiz's my partic-ic-l'r frien', Mr. Abrams,—Mr. Abrams, of Chicago, gen'lem'n. Miss'r Abrams, thiz's my frien'—Lieuten'nt—I—I didn't catch y'r name, sir."

"My name is Lee," said that young gentleman, shortly, and withdrawing the hand of which Mr. Schönberg had possessed himself.

"Lee,—Lieutenant Lee, of the Eleventh Cavalry, Mr. Abrams. Gen'lem'n, I knew all your old frien's of the —th that was here. We were very intimate, all of us, and—excuse me, I didn't catch y-your

name, sir," turning now on Lieutenant Martin. "Gen'lem'n, we're just going to open a quart bottle—my 'xpense. Here, Billy, you son of a gun, bring in the champagne-glasses,—the best you've got. Pommery Sec—Pommery Sec's my wine, gen'lem'n; but if you prefer any other s-say so. W-w-what will you have, Mr.—Mr.——?"

"I don't drink at all, thank you," said Mr. Wallace, briefly. "Come, Martin, going up to luncheon?" he said, turning shortly from the pair of invaders.

"Don't go yet, gen'lem'n. Just one glash champagne,—good-fellowship, you know. Hope I don't 'fend?"

"Not a particle, sir; not a particle," said Martin. "Only you will have to excuse us. We can't drink and shoot too, you know. We've got to be on the rifle-range in half an hour.—Coming, Lee?" Mr. Lee had risen, and was about to move, when Mr. Schönberg threw his arm over the young gentleman's shoulders, striving to detain him.

"Kindly remove your arm, Mr.—Mr.——whatever your name may be," said Lee, his brows knitting and his mouth setting angrily. "I object to drinking champagne in the morning, and to being embraced by strangers at any time."

But at this moment Mr. Stone, the post trader, came hurrying in. He looked aghast when he caught sight of what was going on. Springing forward, he seized the Israelite roughly by the arm.

"Come out of this, Schönberg," he ordered. "You know perfectly well you've got no right whatever to come on this reservation, much less in this room."

"Pray do not disturb the gentlemen, Mr. Stone," said Martin. "We will gladly vacate in their favor."

"Don't you attempt to put me out of here, Stone," shouted the Jew. "I know you. I know what I'm about. You just touch me or let anybody else here in this d——d cowardly hole, and you'll see what'll happen."

The three officers had silently left the room, and were now quietly walking away from the building; but at the sound of a scuffle Lee stopped short.

"Here," he said, "those men are drunk and may do harm. We mustn't leave Stone in the lurch."

"What's the trouble?" queried Mr. Hearn, who had been inspecting the dinner of his troop and now came hurrying down the slope from the barracks. At this very instant, too, Schönberg came backing out of the club-room door, shaking his fist at Stone, who silently and yet threateningly followed; and Schönberg's voice was shrill with rage. Behind them both, his hands in the pockets of his spring overcoat, saying not one word, but glancing quickly about from man to man, followed Mr. Abrams, of Chicago.

"Mr. Hearn," said Stone, "you were here before I came, and you know this man: were not the orders given that he should never again show his face on the reservation, and that he should be put off if he came?"

"Exactly," answered Hearn. "And the sooner you leave it now, Mr. Schönberg, the better it will be for you."

"I'm minding my own business." (He called it "peeznez.") "You mind yours. Maybe you think I've forgot you; but I'll show you. I've had it in for you ever since four years ago, young feller, and just you keep away now, and don't you interfere, or you'll catch it where you don't expect it."

"I'll give you thirty seconds to get in that buggy and drive off, Mr. Schönberg," was Hearn's reply. "Unless you want to be hauled out by the guard, you will start at once. It isn't the first time I've found you stirring up insubordination here."

Schönberg reached his buggy, but kept up his furious language. His companion, still silent, scrambled in, his restless eyes wandering from face to face. The thirty seconds were well-nigh gone when the Jew, aided by Stone's supporting arm, lurched into his seat and picked up the reins. Shaking the whip over Stone's head, he shrieked so that all could hear,—

"By G—d! you may dink you've heard the last of dis—dis outrage; but you'll see! you'll see! If you don't get roasted for dis, dare ain't any newspapers in dis country. I got *your* name down four years ago, Mr. Second Lieutenant Hearn, and now, by G—d! you'll see——"

And then, with an angry lash of his whip upon the flanks of his startled gray, Schönberg with his companion drove rapidly down the road past the stables. As they turned the corner, Mr. Abrams drew from his overcoat pocket a fat note-book and glanced back over his shoulder with a significant smile.

V.

An anxious group had gathered that afternoon over near the hospital. Corporal Brent's symptoms were all indicative of concussion of the brain, and, though the surgeon said there had been no fracture of the skull, he was fearful that fatal consequences might ensue. Among his comrades of the infantry battalion the young soldier was by long odds the most popular and beloved man in the ranks, and that he should have been "slugged," as they expressed it, in the discharge of his duty by some scoundrel of a cavalryman, was developing a very ugly feeling at the post. Murphy and Scanlan had been sent to Coventry among their own comrades for having lent a willing ear to the wiles of the tempter and so led on to the tragedy that followed. Colonel Morris had ordered that Goss should be confined in a cell apart from the ordinary prisoners; but when confronted with the array of a dozen garrison malefactors, neither Murphy nor Scanlan was able to fix on any one of them as the man who accosted them the night of the tragedy and gave them drink at the southwest gate. Goss was like him in size and beard, they said, but that was all that they could assert. It was enough, however, to prompt some of the infantrymen on guard to scaring the prisoner's life almost out of him. He piteously implored the officer of the day at his next visit not to keep him there,—the "dough-boys," he said, had sworn they would lynch him if Brent died,—and again and again he declared himself innocent and the

victim of some conspiracy. When Colonel Morris was informed of the threat, he decided to send the man to the neighboring town and the custody of the civil authorities, that he might be tried by their courts in the event of a fatal termination to the corporal's injuries, but waited until afternoon before issuing the orders in the case.

Major Kenyon, who had taken a deep interest in Brent for some months past, and who had recommended him to study for a commission, was just coming from the hospital ward when Mr. Hearn, passing by the sad-faced group of soldiers who were chatting at the steps, came quickly forward to meet the field-officer:

"How does he seem now, major? I had intended coming earlier, but was detained."

"Just holding his own. I wouldn't go in, if I were you, Hearn. I think footsteps only worry the doctor now.—There is no great change, men," he kindly spoke, as the little knot of soldiers respectfully saluted and looked inquiringly at him. "He has a good fighting chance yet, with his splendid constitution. We can only hope for the best.—Come on, Hearn; I want to ask you something. What's this I hear about your having trouble with that fellow Schönberg?"

"Oh, I had no especial trouble, major: he was out here drunk, I should say, and had got that man Welsh of my troop drinking, so that the fellow was insubordinate again, and the officer of the day ordered him confined. Then Schönberg, it seems, went into the club-room, and, after he had been treating the men to beer in the bar, insisted on treating to champagne and introducing himself to several of the officers who were there. Stone came in and ordered him out, and when I happened along, hearing the noise, he appealed to me as to what the orders in his case had been, and, as I knew that he had been forbidden even to come on the reservation, I told him that if he didn't go, and go at once, I would send some of my men to escort him. Of course he was very violent and abusive, but I paid no further attention to it."

"D—n that villain!" said the major. "He has done more to demoralize the men in this post than all the toughs and gamblers in the community combined. Our fellows have got to know him so thoroughly that the best class of them, at least, steer clear of him entirely; but there was a time when a great many of them never went to town without getting drink or money at his place and having to pay very heavily for it afterwards."

"Oh, I knew him well the first winter I ever spent here," said Hearn. "He was clerk in the sutler's store then; and it was just before I left that he was discharged by his employer, who is dead now. Then he came prying around the barracks at night, bringing liquor to the men, and gamblers out with him from town, playing in the non-commissioned officers' room, fleecing them so badly that they finally complained, and then the order was issued that he shouldn't be permitted on the reservation at all. He had a friend with him to-day whom he was showing around and whom he insisted on introducing: Martin says he called him Abrams, from Chicago."

"Abrams! I don't know anything about him, but the mere fact

of his being here with Schönberg is enough to make me look upon him with suspicion. They were having a confidential talk with your man Welsh, I'm told. Now, what do they know of him? where have they met him before?"

"I can't say, major: he was in the captain's 'household brigade,' and it is only recently that I have had anything to do with him. Of course he has been in and out of town a dozen times the past month, so he never lacked opportunity."

"The doctor tells me you had to haul him out of the bar-room by the coat-collar, and that he threatened and abused you. Take my advice, Hearn; don't ever touch a soldier, no matter how wrong he may be. You should have called for a file of the guard if he would not obey."

"I had no authority over the guard, major, and I had over Welsh. I simply stepped inside, collared him, and marched him out into the sunshine; then Captain Brodie came—— Ah! here's the colonel."

They had turned into the quadrangle at the moment, and came face to face with the post commander, who, followed by his orderly, was crossing the green parade, swinging his cane in the nervous and energetic way peculiar to him.

"Mr. Hearn," he said, in his quick, almost gruff manner, "the officer of the day tells me he has confined Welsh, of your troop, for insubordination and for threatening you, and that he had been at the store with some men from town who were forbidden the reservation: you know the men, I'm told."

"Only one of them, sir. I knew that Jew, Schönberg, the first winter I was stationed here."

"Well, Captain Brodie says he also used threatening language towards you. What does it mean? What could he have to threaten you with?"

"Nothing, sir," answered Hearn, promptly. "At least," and now the hot blood seemed bounding to his temples,—"at least nothing that I have any fear of. He is a blackguard, and I was utterly inexperienced when I came here, so that he got me into some embarrassment in money-matters at the time. It was settled long ago, and I have no idea what he thinks he can trump up now. He used to be clerk and attendant at the store here when old Braine——"

"Yes, yes, I know," said the colonel, impatiently. "It is odd that you young gentlemen will put yourselves in the hands of such people. Now, that fellow has been kept off the reservation all these years, yet here he comes again because he seems to think he has a hold on you, and dares to disobey orders as a consequence."

"I protest, colonel," said Hearn, flushing hotly, "I am in no wise responsible for his actions. You can have the details of the trouble he gave me at any time, and I can show you the papers that long since ended the matter. He has no hold on me, sir, whatever." And the young officer stood before his commander looking both grieved and indignant at the imputation conveyed in the latter's words.

"Well, well, Mr. Hearn, I do not mean to say that he has any ground, only you young gentlemen cannot be too careful about your

associates. Contact with such *canaille* as this must defile you just as much as pitch.—Now, Major Kenyon, how is Corporal Brent?"

Thus having the last word, and having conveyed to the young subaltern a distinct sense of rebuke, Colonel Morris abruptly intimated his desire that nothing further should be said upon the subject. So long as he chose to transfer his attention to Major Kenyon the commander could, of course, prevent further remonstrance; but as Mr. Hearn stood there in evident readiness to resume his own defence, and as the colonel knew very well that he had hardly been fair to him, since Hearn's character had been most exemplary ever since his joining the regiment, his better nature told him that he ought in further words to let the young fellow down easily, as the army expression goes. For reasons of his own, Colonel Morris did not wish to unbend, however, in presence of the infantry major, his second in command. No sooner had he finished his inquiries than he turned to Mr. Hearn again:

"I do not mean to say, sir, that any reason exists for that man's threats, only that I consider it most unfortunate that you or any young officer should ever have put himself in the power of that class of people."

Hearn would have retorted, but for a moment he could not find words at once respectful and convincing. The colonel, having delivered this final volley from his entire line, now promptly retired before the other side could rally, and, as though covered by the smoke of his own fire, tramped away across the parade, leaving the two officers gazing silently after him. The orderly, with hand to cap-visor, sprang briskly past the pair and stalked away in the wake of his cane-twirling commander.

At last Kenyon spoke: "Come, Hearn, when you're as old as I am you'll not fret yourself over glittering generalities like that. Every colonel, I suppose, is full of wise saws and modern instances and must shoot 'em off occasionally. I'll be just as full, no doubt, if I live to be a colonel. It has taken me thirty years' soldiering to get out of company duty, and the Lord only knows how long it will be before I can swap this gold leaf for the silver. Come along, man; I'm going to Lane's a moment to ask the ladies to drive to town this evening, and there's nothing like the women-folk to help one out of the grumps. There they are on the piazza now,—the women, not the grumps. And, by the powers! yonder comes young Lee in his riding-boots to ask Miss Marshall to try a canter."

But Hearn shook his head: "I can't go now; I'm all upset by this thing, major. By heaven! isn't it enough to make a man swear, that a low cad like that can come into his daily life and poison the ears of his friends and associates with slander and innuendo, and that I have to listen in silence to such rebuke as that the colonel gave me?"

"Well, that's what you get for being in the army, my boy. Three days ago you were taking issue with me at Lane's because I said if I had my life to live over again the army was the very last profession I'd seek in this country, and you thought you loved it. Here's Lane, now," he continued, as the gray-eyed captain strolled up and laid his hand kindly on the young officer's shoulder.

"I'm trying to pull Hearn out of the grumps, Lane. Haul him along with us, or he'll be doing something desperate. You remember how enthusiastic he was three days ago,—loved his profession, would rather be a soldier than a railway magnate, wouldn't swap his commission for a million in the four-per-cents. Fetch him along."

And between them, half laughing, half sympathetic, the two officers convoyed their junior towards the shaded veranda where were seated Mrs. Lane, Miss Marshall, and other ladies busy with their needlework and probable gossip. Miss Wharton was of the party, and there were two or three callers. They had noted the colonel's soldierly figure as he tramped across the parade, and were quick to see the two officers coming along the gravel walk. Mrs. Lane half rose, and, smiling brightly, bade them enter. Forage-caps were raised in acknowledgment and salutations exchanged, but the trio hung outside. The major by this time was talking vehemently. Lane was looking grave and anxious. The same perplexed expression was on his face that had been noted at the breakfast-table when reading that letter just before Miss Marshall's entrance the day before. Hearn's face was clouded.

"How can they encourage Major Kenyon to be dilating on his pet hobby!" petulantly exclaimed Mrs. Graves. "He is the most pessimistic, cynical, prosy old crank in the whole service, and will bore them to death. There, now he's backed them up against the fence, and there is no hope for them.—*Do* come in here out of the hot sunshine, Major Kenyon: you can harangue all you like here just as well." But Kenyon paid no attention to his fair comrade of the infantry. For years the women of the —th Foot had made common cause against him, despite the fact that he was one of their most devoted admirers. When Mrs. Lane again called to them to come in and sit on the veranda, however, the captain calmly took his two friends by the elbows and steered them through the gate. Another moment, and the ladies were settling back into their seats, and the major had the floor.

"Yes, Mrs. Lane, I *am* a crank, as my good friend Mrs. Graves has doubtless told you: I have reason to be, and the crank's wound up to-day. Your husband and Hearn here have been combating my views about the desirability of the army as a vocation, and—— I crave your pardon, Miss Marshall, for 'talking shop.'"

"I'm deeply interested, Major Kenyon," responded that young lady. "Go on, I beg of you."

"Well, my views are founded on long experience, and not the very pleasantest. I say—and I say it after years of reflection—that the more a man may love his profession, the better a soldier he is, the more jealous of the honor and reputation of his cloth, the less can he afford to take a position in the army of the United States. Why? Why, because the great mass of the people have no conception whatever of the duties that devolve upon us, of the life we lead, of the trials we encounter. In time of peace they think they have no use whatever for an army, and declare that we do nothing but loaf and drink and gamble. They are *taught* to think so by the press of our great cities, and, never having a chance to see the truth for themselves, they accept the views of their journalists, who really know no more about it than they do,

but do not hesitate to announce as fact what exists only in their imagination. Ever since the war these attacks in the papers have gradually increased from year to year. Now, my home is in Chicago, and, naturally, I read the Chicago papers. I was five years tramping, scouting, skirmishing all through Arizona and Wyoming without ever seeing the inside of a city or even of a railway-car. We lived on hard tack and bacon and what we could pick up when we couldn't get them. We lost many a good soldier in Indian battle during that time, and at last I got a wound that laid me up and sent me home. I hadn't seen the place in seven years. My boyhood had been spent there. Dozens of my relatives and old school-mates lived there, and I looked forward with pleasure to the rest and joy I should have at the old firesides. I didn't suppose that people really believed all the outrageous flings the *Times* and the *News* and the *Sun* and the *Herald*, let alone the *Trades-Union Gazette* and the *Arbeiter Zeitung*, had indulged in at the expense of the army. But I had to wear my uniform for three or four days about the old home, and not only street-boys but grown men respectably dressed jeered and hooted at the dress that for years in the rebel South and all over the frontier had never been treated with insult. Old school-mates patronizingly asked me over their card-tables at the clubs, what on earth I could find to do with myself in the army, and why I didn't quit it and come in here and try to be something. You know perfectly well, Lane, that when you were recruiting in Cincinnati you had just such questions put to you, and you had been through one campaign after another for years. The general manager of the Midland Pacific, every mile of whose road through the Sioux country I and my men had helped to build by standing off the Indians day after day and having many a sharp fight doing it,—this general manager, I say, met me at the Union League and asked me how I had 'managed to kill time on the frontier,' and remarked that it must be a very demoralizing life. He was out next day in a circular cutting down the wages of some twenty thousand employees ten per cent., but thought the rank and file of the army were treated rather like dogs by their superiors. A man, he said, must be at the lowest ebb of self-respect to enlist in the army; as though every one of his army of twenty thousand hard-working, hard-slaving men was not infinitely more at the mercy of a single official than could ever happen in the army of the United States. My own people, by Jove! were so impressed by what they had been reading for years in the papers of army life and army officers that they were perpetually urging me to quit the service and come in and begin life over again at forty-five,—clerking or something. Why, only ten years before, their homes had been rescued from the mob, after police and militia had been whipped to the winds, only by the prompt rush of the regulars from the frontier. Oh, they lionized the 'shoulder-strapped autocracy' then, and for just about one week it wasn't fashionable for a decent paper to lampoon them; but the moment the danger was over their gratitude fled with their anxiety. I tell you, the papers that are sold for two and three cents in our big cities *have* to pander to the prejudices of the masses to keep alive, and there is no surer way of tickling the palates of the populace than by ridiculing or abusing the army officers, and in lending

themselves to this the editors, of course, influence the judgment of people of a much better class,—the great middle class, so to speak, of the whole nation."

"It isn't at all so where I come from," interposed Hearn, promptly. "At home all my kinsfolk are proud of my being in the army."

"Ah! you're a Southerner, Mr. Hearn, and your people are all Americans. All through the North, however, we have an immense foreign population that has fled from the Old World to escape military duty. They hate the very sight of a soldier. Three-fourths of the people of some of our big cities are of foreign birth or parentage. The papers seek their patronage, and in truckling to them they prejudice northern Americans against their own friends and relatives who have been idiots enough to become their defenders. It was bad enough before the war, God knows, but it's worse now. People wonder how it was that it took the North with three million soldiers so long to subdue the South with less than a fourth that number. Now I see nothing to wonder at whatever. The South has always respected the profession of arms; the North has always derided it. Lee with sixty thousand Americans at his back, and only sixty thousand, knocked sixty thousand out of Grant's overwhelming force between the Rapidan and the James. Lee's sixty thousand had the love of every Southern heart to sustain them. How many of the North, think you, had no personal interest in that struggle? How many thousands of the North to-day care nothing whatever for that flag,"—and the major pointed to the standard floating over the garrison,—"and only ask to be let alone to make money their own way? God knows, I'm as loyal a Union man as ever lived, but I don't like to think of the new generation that has sprung up in this country: all soldiers in the South; all—what? in the North."

And old Kenyon, flushed, almost breathless, paused and mopped his brow with a silk handkerchief as red as his face.

There was silence a moment. Captain Lane's kindly features wore an expression half grave, half quizzical. Hearn had edged around nearer where Miss Marshall was sitting, and that young lady had dropped her dainty embroidery in her lap and was listening attentively. Something in the gravity of her demeanor gave Kenyon encouragement.

"Now, you, Miss Marshall, are accustomed to social circles in the North. Tell me frankly, now, did you ever hear men prominent in civil life express any other opinion of the profession of an army officer than that it was rather a useless, dawdling, and unworthy occupation?"

"In peace times, I presume you mean, major?"

"In peace times, certainly; though the necessity for its existence then is as great. You recollect what Washington said: 'In time of peace prepare for war.'"

"I confess that men who lead narrow lives in business or professions and never get beyond the groove are apt to say something of what you suggest, major. But men who think and travel, especially those who have visited our frontier, come back with feelings of much admiration for the army, officers and men."

"Then I'll rest my case with the men who think and travel," said Hearn, laughing brightly. "Come, you old cynic, don't make me believe I have no friends outside my profession, when it sometimes seems as though I hardly had one in it."

"Now, there you go, Hearn," interrupted Kenyon. "That's just exactly where you're wrong. You would trust to the few travelled and educated men; but what are they among the mass of voters, who know nothing of the army but what they read in the papers? Do you ever see anything good of an army officer in any paper until he's dead? Never, unless it's something put in by a 'newspaper soldier;' and God save me from more of them. What could your thinkers and travellers do, even if they would condescend to bestir themselves in our behalf,—which they don't,—as against the masses and the press? No paper in the land is so low but what it can hurt and sting you."

"How? I should like to know."

"How? Simply by printing any low scandal at your expense; and no matter what your record or your character may have been, no matter how damnable a lie may be asserted of you, the mass of the people will read and believe, and your natural protectors—the generals and the War Department—will call upon you to defend yourself against even anonymous assault."

"You do not mean that, major, do you?" asked Miss Marshall.

"I do, emphatically. I have seen officers time and again compelled to report to division or department head-quarters that they were innocent of allegations made by nameless scribblers in the daily press. I have seen the most abstemious men in the army heralded as drunk on duty by a sheet that withheld the name of its informant. But all the same the officers were called to account. When we were sent to aid the marshals in breaking up the whiskey-distilleries in Brooklyn; when the first colored cadets were sent to West Point; when Chicago was burned and we had to shoot some prowling robbers to rid the ruined city of the gang that flocked there; when we were hurried in again in '77, and all the great cities of the North were practically at the mercy of the mob;—at every one of those times, and heaven only knows how many times between, the press made scandalous assertions by *name* about one officer or another. In most cases there was no truth whatever in what was said; in every case, however, the officer was compelled by his superiors to establish his innocence. By heaven! I'll never forget our experience in '77. We were ordered to lose not an instant in reaching Chicago. The strikers had side-tracked the Ninth on one road and blocked the cavalry on another line, and when we stopped for water the railway-men attempted to leave us there. I put Lieutenant Nairn with a small guard at the engine and kept the strikers off, using no force, saying not a word, making no reply to jeers and insult; but the leading paper came out next day and denounced Nairn and me as being armed ruffians, declared we were both reeling drunk, and gave most outrageous details of things that never happened. Of course, as army officers were the targets of this abuse, the article was copied in Eastern papers. Nairn was a man who never drank a drop; had a magnificent war record; was a general officer of

volunteers, and a gentleman honored throughout the whole service. All the same he and I were compelled to submit written denials to department head-quarters, and all the satisfaction we ever got was that the editor said his reporter had perhaps been unduly influenced by the prejudiced statements of the strikers. Why hadn't this occurred to him in the first place? Why didn't he *know* that these men, furious at being thwarted, would say anything to revenge themselves after we had gone on our way? He *did;* but because just such sensational articles would make his paper sell among the masses, and because he knew that where the army officer had one friend he had a score of enemies, that was enough for him. Now, that, and a host of similar experiences, is why I say that no son of mine shall ever take up so thankless a profession. Of course if the country were in danger, the flag assailed, he would fight as I would. As for me, I'm too old a dog to learn new tricks, and having lived my life in the service I must die in it." And again the major paused for breath. "You think I'm an extremist, don't you, Lane?" he finally asked.

"Perhaps so, major, although I admit that the press has been most unjust; but I think we have more friends among the people than you give us credit for."

"Not one bit of it! You think the press knows better now and wouldn't do it all over again. That's what Hearn here would say. Now, you mark my words, gentlemen, so few are our friends in this country,—that is, in the North at least,—either in the press or the public, that any story at the expense of an army officer would be eagerly published by almost any paper in the land, and used as a text by hundreds of editors all over the nation to warrant a vicious stab at our whole array, and the people far and wide would eagerly read, and even those who declared they didn't believe it would be influenced."

"I can't think our people are such fools as to believe yarns that are evidently manufactured to malign," said Hearn, stoutly. "Everybody ought to know that it is from deserters, or dishonorably discharged men, or low camp-followers, that the reporters get their scandals."

"*Ought* to know! yes, I admit it. I have no doubt that the managing editors who publish the things *do* know; but the people don't. And now what has been your own experience, Hearn? How can you blame the people for believing what they read in the papers, when not an hour ago your own colonel, who knows you well, virtually rebuked you because of the vicious ravings of as unprincipled a cad as there is in all Kansas?"

And Georgia Marshall, looking up in surprise, saw the quick flush that leaped to the young soldier's face.

VI.

"Fred, what did Major Kenyon mean by his reference to Mr. Hearn and some story about him?" asked Mrs. Lane that evening, as the captain was locking up after their guests had departed. Miss Marshall, who was glancing over a photograph-album, closed it and rose as though to leave the parlor.

"No, don't go," said Captain Lane, promptly. "I was sorry that Kenyon made any reference to the matter, but, since he did, I want you both—indeed, I think Hearn told me because he wanted you both—to know all about the affair. He had never mentioned it to me, nor to any one, I fancy, before, because there was no need. It was all settled some time ago, but of course he felt sensitive about it. He was a green young lieutenant when he joined here six years ago. This Jew, Schönberg, was clerk at the sutler's. The officers dealt very largely with him then, for town was not as accessible as it is now. The former post trader was a jovial, kindly sort of fellow, who was much liked by everybody, but he left his books and his business in the hands of Schönberg. I have often heard how open-handed he was with his money, and how officers, and men too, never had to go to any banker or scalper if they needed money for an emergency. Anything a friend of his wanted was at his service. Hearn began as a good many boys of his genial temperament are apt to do at a big and expensive post,—got in debt, for everybody wants to give credit to young officers just starting, and then the bills come in all at one swoop afterwards. 'Old Cheery,' as they used to call Braine, saw Hearn's trouble, and insisted on lending him money out of his own pocket. It wasn't a store matter at all; it wasn't entered on Hearn's account. He paid it back in instalments to the old man himself, or was doing it when he received his promotion and had to make the long and expensive journey to Arizona. Except cadets when first joining, officers are not paid advance mileage; they must raise the money as best they can, and it is mighty hard on a young lieutenant. 'Old Cheery,' of course, advanced Hearn another two hundred dollars. The first was paid, all but fifty of it, and he told the boy when he left that he had taken a big liking to him, and that he could just return that at his convenience; but Hearn never lost a day after getting to his new post and obtaining his mileage, but bought a draft for two hundred dollars and sent it to the old man at once, and said in his letter that he would remit the balance of the account and his store bill just as soon as possible. 'Old Cheery' was a man who never wrote letters, but Hearn got a line from his wife, saying that Mr. Braine had received his pleasant letter with its enclosure and sent his best wishes. A few months afterwards the old man suddenly died; the widow moved to town; a new trader came and took the store; and when Hearn sent his next remittance of fifty dollars to the widow he was surprised in the course of a few months afterwards to receive what purported to be a statement of his account with the estate of Thomas Braine, deceased,—a store-bill amounting to over a hundred dollars, and no less than five hundred dollars in borrowed money. He wrote instantly to a friend at Fort Ryan to see the widow and have things straightened out. He protested that his store-bill could not be more than forty or fifty dollars; that old Braine had lent him two hundred dollars at one time, which he had paid back to him all but fifty, and two hundred more when he went to Arizona, which he had instantly repaid, so that the total amount of his indebtedness could not exceed one hundred dollars. But the widow said she didn't know anything about it. Mr. Schönberg had kindly taken charge of

all her affairs, and he had the books and everything and all the correspondence and knew all about it. Hearn, of course, refused to pay anything but the hundred dollars. Then they threatened him with legal proceedings, and next they importuned him through the War Department, which, just as old Kenyon says, believed the blackguard and called on Hearn for an explanation. It nearly drove the young fellow mad. He was proud and sensitive. He couldn't bear to think of the publicity and scandal. He had never given Braine any receipt for the money obtained from him; never had asked any for the money repaid. He was too honorable to deny the fact of having borrowed the money, yet had nothing to show, the old man being dead, for the money that he had returned. I had heard something of his trouble, but was ordered East on recruiting service just then, and began to get into troubles of my own, for it was there I met this young woman." And the captain, with eyes that belied his words, turned fondly to his wife. "The next thing I heard of Hearn, the matter had all been most fortunately settled,—thanks to one of our old captains, who, it seems, had known both Schönberg and the widow Braine. He took the matter up, and the Jew was glad to drop it. Even Hearn does not know what hold he had on them, but it was settled then and there. Hearn paid a hundred dollars, and Schönberg, I am told, had to pay the lawyer whom he had employed. I often think, though, how hard would have been the young fellow's fate if there had been no one to come to the rescue. There isn't a better soldier or braver officer in the Eleventh to-day than Hearn, and he is just as steady as a rock; but soldiers as good as he have been driven out of the army for lack of some such friend as came to him in his extremity."

"You would have helped him, Fred dear," said Mrs. Lane, fondly, crossing over to the captain and stroking the grizzled stubble about his brows as though it were the loveliest hair in the world. Lane possessed himself of the soft white hand and threw his arm about her shapely waist.

"I would certainly, had I known, but nine out of ten do not happen to be able to help, even when our inclinations would lead. And, then, however much we believed in Hearn's story and Schönberg's rascality, who could prove it?"

"Who did prove it?" asked Miss Marshall, after a pause.

"Well, no one, that I know of. All we know is that Schönberg was glad to drop the matter three years ago when Captain Rawlins first tackled the case. Hearn says he has never alluded to it from that time to this until the fellow's language to-day; but that was only some vague drunken threat."

"But if, on the contrary, it should prove that he meant to make more trouble for Mr. Hearn," asked Miss Marshall, "is Captain Rawlins here?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed the captain, starting suddenly to his feet, his face growing as suddenly grave and sad, "that possibly explains the letter that came to me yesterday morning. I was reading it as you came down to breakfast,—a low, anonymous thing, and I burnt it. Now I wish I had kept that."

"About Mr. Hearn, was it?" asked Mrs. Lane, anxiously.

"Yes; and now I can begin to understand it, too.—Miss Marshall," said he, turning impressively towards her, "your question goes to the very bottom of this case. The friend who blocked their game three years ago is gone: Rawlins was killed in the last campaign in Arizona."

"Oh, Fred!" cried Mrs. Lane. "And was there no one else who had helped Mr. Hearn?"

"No one but our old Rawlins, Mabel; and of all men to help him now, he would have been the most valuable here with our new colonel, for he and Morris had been devoted and intimate friends in war days, and I am told the colonel was deeply cut up by the news of Rawlins's death. There was something romantic about their early friendship. Captain Rawlins was a widower whose wife had died within a few years of her marriage, and I have heard that both he and Morris, when young officers, were in love with her, but that she had chosen Rawlins."

"But, Captain Lane," said Miss Marshall, whose thoughts seemed less fixed upon the romantic than upon the practical side of the case, "surely Mr. Hearn has receipts in full for this amount?"

"I so understood him, Miss Marshall; and yet I do not know the nature of the papers to which he refers. I think he said that he had her letter; but that is of less value now."

"And why?" asked Miss Marshall.

"Because the widow married Schönberg."

"'Then must the Jew be merciful,'" quoted Miss Marshall.

And for a few moments not another word was spoken. It was that young lady herself who broke the silence:

"Perhaps you think me unduly apprehensive, Captain Lane. That man's face made a powerful impression upon me when I saw him to-day, and perhaps Mabel has told you something of my own experience in trying to retrieve my father's fallen fortunes when he was too old and broken to do anything for himself. I learned then the worthlessness of spoken words, and that nothing but written contracts and receipts were binding."

She had hardly ceased speaking when the gate was heard to swing on its rusty hinges, a resolute step creaked across the piazza, and somebody was fumbling at the bell-knob.

"Who can that be at this hour of the night?" asked Mrs. Lane, as the captain went to the door. The bolts were drawn back, and a rush of cold night-wind swept in, causing the lamps to suddenly flare and smoke.

"Please, sir, is the doctor here?" a voice was heard to ask.

"No," answered Lane. "What's wanted? He left here about twenty minutes ago. Have you been to his quarters?"

"Yes, sir; and they told me he was here, at Captain Lane's. Corporal Brent is took worse, sir, and the steward thinks the doctor ought to see him. He's wild like, and raving."

"Mabel, dear, I'll be back in a moment," said Lane, reappearing at the parlor door. "Don't wait for me: I'm going to see if the doctor is at Hearn's. They went away together. Corporal Brent is reported worse."

Throwing his cavalry "circular" over his shoulders, Lane stepped forth into the night. It was moonless and pitchy dark. The lamps around the quadrangle were burning brightly, but hardly sufficed to illumine more than a small sphere in the surrounding gloom. Across the wide valley a distant ruddy spark showed where some farm homestead was still alive; and far away to the westward the electric lights, swinging high over the thoroughfares of the thriving town, shone with keen, cold lustre, and were mirrored in some deep, unruffled pool of the stream. Turning his back on these, the captain trudged briskly down the walk, the hospital attendant following, and opened the little gate some fifty yards away from his own. As he surmised, the doctor was here, for his voice, and Kenyon's too, could be heard before Lane tapped at the door.

"Come in," shouted Hearn, in answer to the signal, and the captain entered.

"You are asked for at the hospital, doctor. They say Brent is delirious."

At this the medical man dropped the cigar he had but half smoked and left the room. Lane was for going with him, but Hearn begged him to stay:

"No time like the present, captain, and I want you to see the papers in the celebrated case of Braine *vs.* Hearn while Major Kenyon is here. I'll beg Mrs. Lane's pardon in the morning, and not detain you more than a minute."

Standing against the wall in the midst of what had been old Blauvelt's sitting-room was a plain wooden table with a pigeon-holed desk upon it, the lid of which, turned down, made the writing-shelf. In the pigeon-holes were numerous folded papers, well-filled envelopes, packages of tobacco, a brier-root pipe, a pair of old shoulder-straps, several pairs of gloves, some fishing-tackle, some *carte-de-visite*-sized photographs, a damaged sabre-knot, and the inevitable accumulation of odds and ends with which a subaltern's field-desk is apt to be littered. But the pigeon-holes had been quite systematically labelled. There were compartments bearing the legends "letters unanswered," "letters answered," "personals," "bills paid," "bills unpaid" (both impartially occupied), "pay-accounts," "maps," "field-notes," etc.

"I never knew the necessity of having some sort of system about these matters until after the experience I have been telling you of, captain; and I am indebted to dear old Rawlins for it. You never met him, did you, Major Kenyon?"

"No; except just for a moment in the Shenandoah Valley during the war. He was commanding his regiment then."

"Yes, and lived to be shot down in cold blood by a lot of ambuscading Apaches nearly a quarter of a century after, and—nothing but a captain of cavalry."

"He had some little property here in town at one time," said Kenyon. "That was nearly ten years ago, though, and it went at a sacrifice, I'm told. Perhaps it was while he was a local tax-payer that he got to know your Hebrew friend of to-day."

"He never told me what he knew of him, beyond the mere fact

that he was dishonest and a born mischief-maker. But the moment he took that case up for me Schönberg dropped it. For some reason the Jew was afraid of the old man, as every one called Rawlins."

Hearn was turning over in his hand, as he spoke, a package of folded papers held together by elastic snaps. Removing the upper band, he began looking over the docketing at the top of each paper.

"Rawlins, himself, endorsed this particular packet for me, and showed me how it should be done," he said. "I've often thought that if we could drop out a little slice of the mathematical course at the Point, and have some coaching in this sort of thing, how much better fitted we should be for the every-day duties of life. Now, I—— Why, this is odd. I certainly had those papers in this very packet not three weeks ago. I saw them the day I moved in here. I remember overhauling this very desk at the time."

Nervously he ran through the package again, his fingers rapidly turning the folded pages, his face paling with sudden apprehension.

"There was a letter here from Captain Rawlins, two receipts of Schönberg's, and the letter from Mrs. Braine, all bundled up together, and the endorsement of each in Rawlins's handwriting."

Then he threw down the packet and began pulling out the papers in other pigeon-holes, Kenyon and Lane standing silently by. In vain he searched. Not a vestige of the desired proofs could be found. It was with a white face and eyes that were full of trouble that he turned upon his seniors:

"My God! those papers are gone!"

"Look in your trunk, man," said Lane, kindly: "don't give up yet;" while Kenyon, himself, began a search on his own account in the now disordered desk.

"Was this always kept locked when you went out, Hearn?" asked the major. "Surely such important papers ought not to be left lying around loose."

"Locked? Yes. At least I never was away for any time without locking it. Sometimes, just going out to receive reports at roll-call, I would not lock up; for who would want to rob a fellow of papers of no value to any one but the owner?"

The major looked grave. Lane's face was full of anxiety which he hardly knew how to conceal. Both well knew the almost universally careless habits of the bachelor officers in garrison. Their doors are never locked; their rooms are empty half the time, and their pocket-books empty ordinarily as their rooms; their books, papers, desks, even trunks, almost always lying unguarded about the premises. Servants and orderlies move from house to house unquestioned, and the rear doors are unfastened day and night. "We have nothing worth stealing," is the general theory, "so why bother about locking an empty stable?"

"Who is your servant?" asked Kenyon, brusquely.

"Our black boy, Jake. He has taken care of my rooms and traps for three years, and works for Wallace and Martin, too. He's as honest a nigger as ever lived; has been with the regiment longer than I have."

"Yes; Jake isn't half a bad boy. But was there no one else who had the run of the premises?"

"Not a soul. Jake, himself, is rarely here except when at work."

There was a moment's silence. The major presently sauntered over and tried the door leading to the dining-room.

"Here is the key, if you want to go in there," said Hearn. "I have kept all the rooms locked since Blauvelt left, except this one and my bedroom up-stairs. The back door is locked too. Jake always comes in the front way. I don't suppose any one has come through the kitchen since the day the captain's family left."

"Didn't Welsh have to come here for his traps?" asked Lane.

"Yes; but he was under guard at the time,—had a sentinel over him,—and both Jake and I were here. He took nothing out of this house but his own personal belongings, and never entered this room at all that day. I couldn't help it, but after seeing him with Schönberg to-day the first explanation of my loss that occurred to me a moment ago was—Welsh. Yet how could he have been the man?"

There was another moment of silence. Lane stood thoughtfully examining the lock of the desk, then strolled into the hall and tried the key of the front door. As he stood there under the swinging lamp, the clink of an infantry sword was heard at the gate, and the voice of Captain Brodie:

"What are you youngsters doing at this hour of the peaceful night? Come out here and worship nature and visit sentries for me. Oh! beg your pardon, Lane: I thought it must be some of the boys."

"Major Kenyon and I have been keeping Hearn awake," was the answer. "We were just going."

"Hello, Brodie," quoth the major, as he, too, came forth. "Have you been to see how Brent is?"

"Delirious, I'm told. Only the doctor and the steward are with him. I was just waiting for twelve o'clock to go down and stir up the sentries. There ought to be none but cavalry officers of the day at this post, by Jove, so that they could ride around among these outside sentries. It's too far for a Christian to walk twice in twenty-four hours. Thank God, there's the call now."

At the first words from the lips of the sentry at the guard-house the lamps at the two western gates were promptly extinguished, and then the forms of two men could be discerned flitting from post to post, extinguishing each lamp in turn. Soon the entire quadrangle was wrapped in total darkness, and the silent stars gleamed all the more brilliantly in the unclouded sky. Far over to the westward the reflection of the electric lights, a pallid, sickly glare upon the heavens, suddenly faded into nothingness.

"That's the first time the town clock and ours have been so close together since my coming to the garrison. Where did we get this custom of dousing the glim at midnight?" asked Lane.

"The —th started that when they were here. Got it from town, perhaps. Listen a moment," answered Brodie. "I want to hear the sentries down towards the bridge."

Faint and far, though borne on the wings of the soft night-wind,

the call of No. 7 had just sounded. It was now the turn of the farthest sentry, No. 8, whose post was down the winding road at the haystacks and wood-yard. A rich, musical Irish voice, softened by distance, began its soldier troll:

"N-umber Eight.—Tw-el-ve o'clock,—and a-a-all's—— *Who goes there? Halt! Halt!* Corp'l the gu-a-ard—Number Eight!" Bang!

Hearn was the first of the four officers to reach the southwest gate. He could hear the footfalls of the officer of the guard running rapidly down the road past the stables, and without hesitation followed full tilt. The guard was hurriedly turning out and forming. It was the sergeant who faced it to the front and made the customary report to Captain Brodie, as the officer of the day came panting to the spot:

"Sir, the guard is present and the prisoners secure."

An audible snicker in the prison-room followed these words. A corporal file-closer stepped back into the guard-room and gruffly ordered silence among the prisoners, which only evoked more tittering and whispering. A sudden thought occurred to the officer of the day.

"Bring your lantern here," he said, as he strode through the guard-room into the narrow passage beyond. On one side was the prison-room whence the sound proceeded; on the other were the cells.

"Open these doors," he ordered.

"There's only one cell occupied, sir; the third."

"Open that, then."

The heavy door creaked on its hinges. A gust of cool night-air blew through the cell. The window was wide open. The iron slats were sawed away. The bird had flown. Private Goss, the assailant of Corporal Brent, was gone.

VII.

In the soft, June-like weather of that memorable week at Ryan the ladies spent but little of their waking moments in-doors, and even the broad verandas of the colonel's quarters on the north side were no more popular or populous than those of Captain Lane at the southwest corner. Mrs. Lane and Miss Marshall attributed this to the fact that the sun on its westward way passed behind their cosey home and left the front piazza cool and shaded, whereas even the canvas hangings in front of the Morrises' could not quite shut out the glare. But Mrs. Morris laughingly declared that since their coming into the society of Fort Ryan she had become "a decided back number." Whether the theory of the colonel's wife were true or not, it must be said to her credit that she accepted the situation with charming grace, and was quite as frequent a visitor at the Lanes' as many of the younger women. Her own guests had departed, leaving her somewhat lonely, she said; and, while she thought it by no means a proper or conventional thing that she should be so constantly visiting people who so seldom honored her, she could not but have ocular proof at all hours of the day that Mrs. Lane and her fair friend Miss Marshall could not sally forth to make calls except at the price of leaving a number of callers in the lurch. There were other young ladies in garrison, just then,—Miss Wharton, visiting her brother, and Miss McCrea, staying at the Burn-

hams'. There were several pretty girls in the neighboring town, who frequently came out and spent a few days with the families at the post; and all these, of course, as well as the young married ladies, were the recipients of much attention on the part of the officers, young and old. It is a fact well understood in army circles that few officers are too old to tender such attentions, and no woman too old to receive them.

And Mrs. Lane was rejoicing in the success of her projects for the benefit of Georgia Marshall. Her friend was a pronounced success from the day of her arrival; and yet it was somewhat difficult to say why. She was not a beauty, despite her lovely eyes; she had none of those flattering, soothing, half-caressing ways some women use with such telling effect on almost every man they seek to impress. She was not chatty. She was anything but confidential. She was rather silent, and decidedly reserved, yet a most attentive listener withal; and then she had the courage of her opinions. Her prompt and prominent part in the little drama enacted the night of her arrival had made her famous in the garrison; her frank, unaffected, but gracious ways had done much to make her popular. The statement that she was an orphan and poor, combined with the fact, which the other women so speedily determined, that she was not pretty, had removed her, presumably, from the range of jealousy. The other girls found her very entertaining, since she let them do much of the talking, and were willing to accord to her a certain quiet style of her own. The men were glad to be civil to any friend of Mrs. Lane's. And yet Georgia Marshall had not been there a week before, as Mabel confidently predicted, she was having in abundance *tête-à-têtes* of her own.

It was the third morning after the escape of the prisoner Goss, and for forty-eight hours nothing else had been talked of among the soldiers, and nothing had excited so much comment among the families at the post. Up to this moment not a trace had been found. The two iron slats in front of his window had been cut through swiftly and noiselessly from within with watch-spring saws, and the tallow and iron-filings lay about the stony window-sill. He had been thoroughly searched before being put in that cell, and it was absolutely certain that neither files nor tallow were then in his possession. The guard swore that no man had had access to him afterwards. A wire netting prevented anything from being thrown to him from the outside, and this had been forced upward and outward after the bars were cut. The sergeant of the guard was sure that no man had touched or even spoken to him, except when he, himself, had seen his dinner and supper handed in. There could have been no collusion on the part of the sentries, for the men on No. 1 all through the day and night were of the infantry, and warm friends of Brent, who would have lost no chance of putting a bullet through the supposed assailant in the event of his attempting to escape. The blacksmith said it would take several hours —at least five—to file through those two bars, and the man must have worked with the patience of a beaver. It was a drop of only seven feet to the ground without, for the window overlooked the up-hill slope back of the guard-house; and yet, as he probably had to come through head first, that was quite a fall. The prints of his outspread hands

were found in the dust-heap, and it looked as though he must have lain there some moments before stealing away.

The sentry far down by the wood-yards, No. 8, stated that just as he was calling off and standing faced to the east so that his voice might carry to the guard-house, he heard a sudden stumble behind him; a man tripped over a log between him and the road, then ran like mad down toward the old station. It was too dark to recognize who it could be. The officer of the guard had stopped to interrogate the sentry on reaching his post, but Mr. Hearn had pushed ahead, and down at the foot of the hill had plainly heard a horse's hoofs and the light rumble of wheels crossing the bridge and going at a spanking trot; yet soldiers returning from pass, reliable men, had neither seen nor heard horse or wagon anywhere on the flats along which lay the road to town. An effort had been made to trail the wheel-tracks from the bridge, but, though a place was found among the trees near the old station where a horse and buggy had evidently stood for two or three hours, it was impossible to determine which way they had gone after crossing the stream, for the farm-wagons coming from every by-road in the morning had totally obliterated the tracks.

Goss's escape while under charges of such grave character was regarded as tantamount to admission of his guilt.

Meantime, Corporal Brent's case seemed to have taken a turn for the better, and, though there was still danger, there was hope. What struck many inquirers was the fact that the doctor seemed ill at ease, and invariably evaded the question, when pressed as to the nature of Brent's delirium. This, of course, simply served to whet public curiosity; and the young soldier became, all unconsciously, an object of greater interest than ever. The ladies of the infantry, who had known him by sight some time, were certain that from the very first he had borne all the outward appearance of a gentleman, and in every word and gesture had "given the world assurance of a man" of birth and breeding. Their sisters of the cavalry, who had but recently reached Fort Ryan, were not slow in accepting their theories. Such things were by no means uncommon in the service; and wouldn't it be delicious, now, to have a romance in the ranks at Ryan? Only fancy! Mrs. Burnham, Mrs. Brodie, and, above all, Mrs. Graves, were quite ready to go to the hospital at any time the doctor would permit and become the nurse of the young corporal; but the medical man almost bluntly declined the services of two of these ladies, and with positive insolence, said the third, had told her she could much better devote her ministrations to her own children. "Just as if I didn't know best what my children needed!" said the offended matron.

And it was about Dr. Ingersoll that Mrs. Graves was discoursing this very morning on Mrs. Lane's piazza, while her own olive-branches were clambering the fences and having a battle royal with the progeny of Mrs. Sergeant Flynn at the other end of the garrison. And, as luck would have it, who should come along the gravel walk but the major and the doctor, arm in arm! at which sight Miss Marshall's expressive eyes, brimming with merriment, sought the half-vexed features of Captain Lane, who had been fidgeting uneasily in his chair during her

ladyship's exordium. Like many another excellent soldier, this practised trooper had no weapon with which to silence a woman's tongue.

"You'll find I'm right, Mrs. Lane. See if you don't," proceeded Mrs. Graves, all unconscious of the coming pair. "You found I wasn't mistaken about Major Kenyon; and they are just as like as two peas in a pod,—both of them."

Then, recalled to the possibilities of the situation by the mirthful gleam in Miss Marshall's eye and the audible chuckles of Mr. Lee, she whirled about and caught sight of the object of her dissertation.

"Oh, it's you they're laughing at, is it?" she hailed. "I was just talking about you."

"Then how could you find the heart to laugh, Mrs. Lane?" said the major, raising his cap with simulated reproach of mien. "Does it amuse you to see fellow-mortals flayed alive? Is it not bad enough that, like Sir Peter Teazle, I am never out of Mrs. Graves's sight but that I know I've left my character behind me? The doctor and I were wondering whether there was a vestige left of the good impression we strove to make upon Miss Marshall."

"I'm sure you ruined all possibility of that three days ago, major, when you showed her what a cynical old party you were. No wonder the young officers in our regiment lose all love for their profession after hearing you talk. If I were Colonel Morris, I wouldn't have you contaminating the lieutenants of the Eleventh the way you were trying it on Mr. Hearn the other day."

"Where is Mr. Hearn, by the way?" asked Mrs. Lane, eager to put an end to such unprofitable controversy. "He hasn't been in here for nearly two days. Come, major,—come, doctor, walk in and sit awhile. We want to hear how Corporal Brent is, too."

"Brent seems easier, Mrs. Lane, thank you," answered the surgeon. "I cannot stop just now; we came over to meet the mail, for the orderly seems to have an unusually big load this morning. Here come the youngsters up from the post-office now."

And, as he spoke, perhaps half a dozen young cavalrymen, still in their riding-boots and spurs, as though they had but just returned from drill, came slowly up the slope. Wharton had an open newspaper which he was reading aloud; the others were hanging about him, evidently listening with absorbed attention, to the neglect of their own letters.

"What's the matter with the boys?" asked Kenyon, whimsically, as they approached. "They look as solemn as owls."

Naturally, all eyes were drawn toward the coming party. Lane, bending forward, saw that Hearn's face was pale, even under the coat of tan and sunburn. He would have passed them by, simply lifting his cap, as Wharton half folded the paper when the group filed in through the main gate, but again Kenyon spoke:

"What makes you look so like a pack of mutes, lads? What's gone wrong? Is Congress sailing into us again?"

"Major Kenyon," said Martin, deliberately, halting in front of the gate, "I said some disparaging things about your remarks here the other day. I beg your pardon, sir. You were right; I was wrong.

—Hold on, Hearn: don't go now and brood over this thing. Stay here with the crowd, and we'll take it all together."

Lane had half risen, anxiety deepening in his dark-gray eyes:

"What is it, Hearn? Come in here,—come in, all of you."

And Georgia Marshall, glancing from one face to another, noted the silence and gravity that had fallen on each. Some looked full of suppressed wrath, others simply perplexed and annoyed. Without a word to any one, Hearn stepped in and stood beside her chair.

"You best know your own papers, major: you read this aloud," said Martin.

And Kenyon, looking about in momentary surprise, unfolded the great pages of the Chicago daily. His eyes gleamed as they caught the heavy head-lines at the top of the sheet.

"Hello! hello! what's this?" he said. "Army Brutality. Outrageous Treatment of Private Soldiers. Civilians Insulted and Abused. A Thug in Shoulder-Straps. Lieutenant Hearn a Cowardly Bully. Special Despatch to the *Palladium*. CENTRAL CITY, May 3.—For years past the citizens of this thriving frontier town have had frequent cause for complaint as to the swaggering and insolent bearing of the officers of the army stationed at the neighboring post of Fort Ryan; but of late the feeling has reached fever-heat, due to recent occurrences which attracted wide-spread attention. Acting under instructions, your correspondent reached this city five days ago, and has made a thorough, impartial, and exhaustive investigation into the matter; has talked with many, if not all, of the prominent citizens; has personally visited the post and conversed with a number of intelligent enlisted men; and, as a result of his painstaking observations, he is enabled to send you the following account, for the absolute accuracy of every detail of which he vouches unreservedly.

"So far as the enlisted men are concerned, the people have no complaint to make. It is, indeed, the contemplation of their wrongs and sufferings that has roused the popular clamor against their aristocratic and overbearing taskmasters. Just why it is that the instant a young man escapes from that hot-bed of flunkeyism and snobbery, West Point, and dons the straps of a second lieutenant, he should imagine that he owns the earth and that the nations should bow down to him, is something no intelligent mind can understand. But to become convinced that it is so beyond peradventure, one has only to visit this representative army post, garrisoned as it is by large detachments of so-called distinguished regiments; though, from all accounts, the distinction they have earned seems chiefly to be connected with drinking-bouts and gambling-tables.

"On every side it was declared to your correspondent that civilians who ventured out to the fort were treated with contumely and insult; that the officers rudely ordered them off the reservation and forbade them to enter the sacred precincts of the barracks, and even caused their ejection from the public store and saloon, kept at the post by one Stone, who truckles, of course, to his official neighbors and obtains in return the mandate that the soldiers must spend their money with him at swindling prices, and the prohibition against their having any deal-

ings with the reputable merchants in the city. On the other hand, the merchants who have been so unfortunate as to trust the officers are not able to collect their bills at all, and are absolutely forbidden to enter the garrison when they seek to press their claims.

"Here is the brief history of one day's experience. In company with one of the oldest, wealthiest, and most respected business-men of this section, your correspondent drove to Fort Ryan this morning to see for himself how far the facts would justify the allegations, and if a lingering doubt remained it was at once and forever rudely dispelled. A case of particular hardship had been brought to our attention, and we desired to see Trooper Welsh in person. He was on sick-report, excused from drill by reason of the treatment that had been accorded him by the commanding officer of his troop, or we probably could not have seen him at all. Seizing a moment when the officers were away at drill, Mr. S. sent a message asking the young soldier to come out. A fine-looking, intelligent man of about twenty-five years was presented to your correspondent, and briefly and simply told his story. It was enough to make an American's blood boil in his veins to note the emotion and humiliation it seemed to cause him. He came of an excellent family in the East, but, having long desired from patriotic motives to become a soldier of the flag, he had against their wishes enlisted under an assumed name. From the very start his captain had compelled him to work about his house like a common drudge. He had to black boots, build fires, sweep the kitchen, actually do chores for the captain's cook. In vain he begged to be allowed to join his troop and learn his duty as a soldier: he was sternly refused. It made his own comrades among the soldiers look down upon him, and when he could find time to visit them at the barracks the sergeants abused him like a thief. But the man who particularly hounded him was Second Lieutenant Hearn, a young martinet fresh from West Point, who never lost a chance of cursing him for errors on drill or mistakes made afterward. The captain had taught him that when at work for him he must not quit it to jump up and salute every lieutenant who happened along; and just because he remained seated and at work when Lieutenant Hearn passed by, the latter cursed him like a dog, had him thrown into a filthy dungeon, and there he lay until he was tried by court-martial and sentenced by a gang of Hearn's comrades to fine and imprisonment for obeying his captain's orders. Another time, when he was cleaning the captain's horse, the lieutenant's horse, which was next him on the line, kept backing over him, treading on him, and knocking his brushes out of his hand; and because he simply pushed him back and spoke sharply, Lieutenant Hearn rushed in and swore he had a mind to kick him black and blue. 'If he had,' said Welsh,—and the young soldier's eyes blazed with pent-up feeling,—'I could no longer have controlled myself. I would have knocked him down and appealed to the people of America to uphold me.' For this he was again thrust into the vermin-haunted dungeon, and this made him so ill that the surgeon himself had been compelled to interpose in his behalf. 'I would desert and end it all,' said the poor fellow, with tears in his eyes, 'but I have sworn to serve my

country, and I shall keep my oath.' When told that the *Palladium* would see him righted, though the heavens fell, his emotion was something that would have melted the stoutest heart.

"But now comes the crowning peak of blackguardism. Warned by some spy, doubtless, of the fact that his victim was telling his story to citizens, Lieutenant Hearn suddenly appeared on the scene, and before our eyes, with vulgar abuse and tyrannical bearing, ordered Private Welsh instantly to leave. In vain the young soldier respectfully pleaded that he had a right to speak with friends who came to see him. In vain he pointed out that he was on no duty at the time. In vain Mr. S. interposed in behalf of justice and decency. The brutal bully seized the weakened invalid in an iron grasp, dragged him like a dog to the gutter in front, and then, with cuffs and curses, drove him before him into the guard-house. Meantime, Mr. S., who had formerly many friends at the post, hastened into the officers' club-room, hoping to explain the matter and secure justice for the unfortunate fellow. But it was a hapless move. What business had he, a civilian, to intrude uninvited into the mighty presence of half a dozen beardless young satraps in shoulder-straps? He was rudely ordered to leave the premises; and when, in his indignation, he protested against such treatment, Lieutenant Hearn himself came back boiling with rage, calling for his troopers to come and eject these intruders from the garrison. We were actually driven by force off the reservation.

"Your correspondent has, of course, made immediate and respectful representation of these facts to the general commanding the department, and when next he visits the fort will do so with a safeguard that no bully in the uniform of a second lieutenant will dare gainsay. This is but the prelude of further details still more disgraceful to the pampered minions of a too long-suffering public."

For a few moments there was silence. Then the major glanced around his circle of listeners.

"Well, Hearn," said he, as he folded the paper, "somewhere I have heard the expression, 'Didn't I tell you so?' *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.* I don't wonder you love your profession."

"Surely they cannot believe such an outrageous tissue of lies," burst out Mrs. Wharton, vehemently. "Surely the moment our side of the story is heard the public will see the difference."

"Our side, my dear madam, is never heard. The newspaper has the public ear. Scandal spreads world-wide; truth never reaches half as far. Hearn has only one recourse,—grin and bear it, and pray God nothing worse may follow."

"What worse can follow, I should like to know?" asked Lee, indignantly.

"What worse? Why, man, you don't suppose a Chicago paper sends an emissary a thousand miles to work up only one scene in a sensation? Look for the next day's issue, and the next. Wait till the letters demanding explanation begin coming in from department, division, and army head-quarters. *Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum*, will be the *Palladium's* cry; *Parturiunt montes, nascitur ridiculus mus*, the outcome. But all the same, my friends and fellow-citizens, we don't get

through this row without the biggest kind of a court-martial.—Ah, the orderly of the commanding officer! Whom does *he* want?"

Not a word was spoken, and every eye was fixed upon the trim figure of the approaching soldier, who entered the gate and, halting respectfully a few yards away from the foot of the steps, saluted:

"The colonel's compliments to the officer of the day, and desires that Private Welsh, now in the guard-house, be sent to the office immediately."

"Aha!" said Kenyon, as the soldier turned away. "Already somebody's been tickling the colonel with a telegram. He's hardly had time to read the papers. Now he will hear Welsh's story; and when Welsh has sufficiently blackened the character of his commanding officer, Hearn will be afforded his chance.—Hearn, my boy, my hearty sympathies are with you. By all means go on and prosper in your profession, and learn to love it as I do.—Martin, you and he have a moment to spare, come over to my quarters with me: I want to talk this thing over with you.—Good-afternoon, Mrs. Lane. Good-afternoon, Mrs. Graves. A sudden thought occurs to me. What was it Cambronne is reported to have said at Waterloo?—'The Guard dies, but never surrenders.' Here's a more modern epigram for you: The Press lies, but never retracts."

VIII.

With all his soldierly qualifications, Colonel Morris, like most of his sex, had certain defects of character. He was a tireless worker as a regimental commander, and had done a great deal to bring up the "tone" of the Eleventh, which had suffered vastly during the reign of old Riggs, his predecessor. He had won a good name as a young officer in the war days, and had borne himself well in the more trying and hazardous campaigns of the far frontier. But Morris, both during the war and since, had seen staff duty that had brought him into social and political circles in Washington; had learned there the lesson that an ounce of influence is worth a pound of pure record; that in most matters affecting army legislation it was the men who were the farthest away from the army whose opinions Congress sought; that in all appointments to the staff departments personal and professional excellence might plead in vain unless backed by Senators by the score; and that while judicious use of the gifts that God had put in his way in the shape of the public press might result in the gradual rearing of a monument of popular esteem, a single unguarded word or petulant expression would tumble the whole fabric about his ears. He had seen the highest names in legislative, financial, and social circles dragged in the dust; the head of the House of Representatives dethroned; a Wall Street monarch execrated; a gallant soldier, maimed in battle, ridiculed. In combined and resistless assault the press had overwhelmed the record of years. Morris had faced death in a dozen fields without a flinch, but he trembled in the presence of a reporter.

Nervous, irritable, and unstrung, he called his officers about him on the following day. Guard-mounting was still in progress; the band was playing sweetly on the grassy parade; the ringing voice of

the soldierly young adjutant swung the column around in its jaunty march in review. One after another the troop and company officers came quietly in, bade their flushed commander a courteous good-morning, and took their seats. He was pacing the floor, tugging at his moustache, another telegram in his hand.

"Where's Dr. Ingersoll?" he asked, suddenly stopping in his walk.

"Here, colonel," said the post surgeon, stepping within the office from the brick pavement outside. "I was waiting a moment to see the steward, to give some directions as to Brent's case."

"Ah, yes. He's better, I believe. Now, I see you have marked Welsh for duty, and the man tells me he couldn't sleep all night because of pains and chills."

"Welsh is as well as I am, Colonel Morris, or if ill has only himself to blame. He knows as well as I do that he has no business to go to the store and drink when under treatment and taking medicine. It is my firm conviction, sir, that that man is simply trying to shirk."

"Well, well, Dr. Ingersoll, it is a matter in which we cannot be too careful. You haven't the faintest conception, sir, to what this most unfortunate affair may lead. It is infinitely better that we should be imposed upon by a shirk than that the public should get to look upon us as this man's persecutors. The *Palladium* that came yesterday was bad enough, in all conscience, but here's another telegram from department head-quarters demanding immediate investigation and report upon the allegations contained in the second day's issue of the series. How many are there to be, in heaven's name?—Mr. Hearn, have you submitted your explanation?" said the colonel, turning abruptly upon the young lieutenant, who was sitting in pained silence by Captain Lane.

"It is in the hands of the adjutant, sir," answered Hearn, rising.

"I have not seen it,—I have not seen it. I hope you have been full and explicit, Mr. Hearn."

The lieutenant's pale face flushed with sudden sense of indignation:

"I have never yet been accused of any attempt at concealment of my actions, Colonel Morris. Gentlemen present who have known me nearly six years will tell you that."

"I'm not accusing you of anything, Mr. Hearn. Pray keep your temper, sir. But you do not seem to appreciate in the least the very trying and unpleasant position in which you have, however unwittingly, placed every officer at this post, especially me, on whom the burden of responsibility must fall. If I had known four days ago that you had used violence—or at least force—in ejecting that soldier from the bar-room, I should certainly have discountenanced his further punishment. This sort of thing cannot be tolerated, Mr. Hearn.—And, gentlemen, I say it to you one and all, this sort of thing cannot be allowed. It creates a wrong impression among the people. It gives the press an opportunity to criticise our methods of discipline. It makes a martyr of the man in the eyes of the public, and we can't stand it. I have felt compelled to release him from confinement and to direct the quashing of the charges against him."

There was a moment of dead silence. Hearn was struggling to control himself and to protest that he had used neither violence nor any force worth speaking of. But Captain Brodie took the floor:

"I must ask your pardon, Colonel Morris, but I was witness to that transaction from beginning to end, and I myself ordered Welsh taken to the guard-house. It was after that, not before, that force was used. Welsh cursed and resisted the corporal of the guard——"

"Never mind, Captain Brodie: what seems to have infuriated the man, and what has given rise to all this uproar of the press, is the fact that Mr. Hearn, as they say, dragged him out. Of course that may be exaggerated."

"It's a d——d lie," muttered old Kenyon, under his breath. "But all the more it goes."

"I do not wish to be unjust to Mr. Hearn in this matter," continued the colonel. "But I cannot too strongly deplore the consequences of his—of his action. And then in threatening to expel civilians from the garrison! What earthly right had you, Mr. Hearn, to arrogate to yourself the faculties of commanding officer? *I* am the only man to say who shall and who shall not be kept on or off the reservation. And now, of all men on earth that you young gentlemen should have been particularly careful not to antagonize, it turns out that one of them is a representative of the press."

And, in the full realization of a circumstance so calamitous, the colonel sank into his chair. Hearn would have explained that he had made no personal threats, but Lane's restraining hand was laid on his knee.

"Patience, lad!" he whispered. "Say nothing now. It will all come right in the end."

"I'm sure I took the utmost pains to be civil to the a—gentlemen," drawled Martin, with his innocent eyes on the vacancy of the opposite walls. "I implored Stone not to eject them. I had to beg off drinking with the—a-Israelitish party because I had to shoot. Of course, colonel, if I had known that the other gentleman was so highly connected, there's no saying to what length I wouldn't have gone to attain the elevation they had already reached,—one of them at least. A dozen drinks, I think, might have done it."

"This is no occasion for the exercise of your sarcastic powers, Mr. Martin," said the colonel, severely. "It is to be hoped your civility was less transparent a sham than your present remarks."

"Pardon me, colonel," interposed Lieutenant Lee, whose seat was near the window. "Here comes the gentleman himself."

Surely enough, a buggy drew up in front of the office, a bulky form slowly descended, and, with much deliberation of manner, Mr. Abrams, of Chicago, looked about him, then proceeded to tie his horse to a young maple at the edge of the walk. The orderly sprang forward:

"Beg pardon, sir, but it's against orders to tie horses to the trees. The horse-posts are across the road."

"Against whose orders?" said the gentleman from Chicago, with slow and impressive movement, turning upon the trim soldier.

"The colonel's orders, sir. Even the officers can't leave their horses in front of head-quarters, sir."

"My God! Here! this will never do!" fidgeted the colonel, springing to his feet. "Mr. Adjutant, send a man out here."

"Shall I take care of the gentleman's horse?" said Martin, with grave humility of mien, rising slowly to his feet, as the colonel strode to the door. But Morris was too hurried to hear him, or even to rebuke the titter with which the words were greeted. By this time, paying no attention to the orderly, the representative of the *Palladium* had reached the door-way and was brought face to face with the post commander:

"Colonel Morris, I presume. I am the bearer of an order to you from department head-quarters."

"Colonel Morris, sir, at your service," replied the post commander, with much suavity. "A letter, I presume. Walk in, Mr.—Mr.—— Take a chair, sir."

Several of the officers nearest the door had risen promptly, as though in readiness to receive with due honors the colonel's guest. Others slowly followed their example. Some remained seated and continued a low-toned chat. All gradually resumed their seats, and, while some with evident curiosity studied the appearance of the stranger, Brodie and Lee looked at him with eyes that plainly spoke their resentment, while Hearn's hands were clinched and his lips compressed. No word was spoken to the new arrival, however. He, with entire indifference of manner as to all the rest, fixed his gaze upon the commanding officer, who rapidly read. The note was short and to the point. Morris had reason to be thankful for his diplomatic training.

"I am greatly pleased to give you welcome, Mr. Abrams," he said, extending his hand with much apparent cordiality of manner. "This, while by no means necessary, of course adds to the readiness with which we open our doors to you. Had I known you were here and desirous of visiting the post for any purpose in the interests of your paper, I should have found means to welcome you before, and am only sorry you did not make your presence known to me."

Major Kenyon had risen as the colonel was speaking, and now in low tone and with much respect of manner accosted him:

"By your leave, colonel, if there be nothing further in the way of business, may I request your permission to retire?"

"Certainly, Major Kenyon.—And, gentlemen, there were some matters to which I desired to call your attention, but it is so near time for 'boots and saddles,' we will defer the matter until to-morrow. I will not detain you further."

There were one or two among the score of officers present who desired to see the colonel on some routine matters; these contented themselves with going over to the adjutant's desk, as he entered, and whispering their requests to him; the others promptly took their leave and sauntered out into the sunshine. Mr. Abrams noted the occurrence with a quiet but suggestive smile.

For a moment no one among the little group seemed to find any-

thing to say. It was Mr. Lee who gave the first expression to personal opinion. He burst out into a fit of laughter.

"I'm blessed if I can see anything to laugh about in this affair, Mr. Lee," said the major, whose face was a shade moodier than ever. "If anything was needed to confirm what I have hitherto said on the subject, here you have it. Perhaps it pleases you to see a comrade vilified by the press and then bulldozed by his commanding officer, who well knows the paper lied, but daren't stand up for one of his subalterns. And then to think of the fellow's impudence, announcing himself as the bearer of an order from head-quarters! If I had been in command I should have told him orders were never sent by the hand of civilians."

"Sail into the paper, if you like, Major Kenyon, but leave the *colonel* alone; that's purely our business," was the prompt reply.—"Captain Lane, may I ask if the colonel has requested an invitation to dinner to-night for his friend Mr. Abrams, of Chicago? I understand that Mrs. Morris and the chief are among your guests."

"He hasn't yet, Lee, and, if he should, the quartermaster will have to knock down a partition, for my dining-room can only hold twelve or fourteen by severe squeezing."

"Captain," said Hearn, as they walked away, "I'm going to ask you to excuse me to-night. I would only be a cloud at your feast, and after what has passed I don't feel as though I could sit at dinner with the colonel."

"Hearn, my boy, you must come. We are not going to let you crawl into a corner now and brood over this. It is the very time when we want to stand by you and show how much we hold you in esteem."

"Yes," was the bitter reply, "yes, my colonel has given a glorious exhibition of what constitutes *esprit de corps* in the Eleventh. No, captain, I would do anything for you or Mrs. Lane, but I can think, speak, dream, of nothing now but the wrong that has been done me, and I would only be a drag. You will excuse me, won't you?"

"Come in, come into the house, Hearn," answered Lane, as they reached the gate. "Come in and talk it over with Mrs. Lane and Miss Marshall; they will do you good. They are both full of sympathy. Come; it's quarter of an hour before drill."

But Hearn shook his head and drew away.

"I cannot," he said; "I must go; there's my home letter yet unwritten."

And so, with Lane's anxious eyes following him, he strode rapidly away to his quarters. There Jim Wallace joined him at the gate.

Three hours later, however, with drill over and the mail in, the question of dinner became of minor importance. Marked copies of the *Palladium* had been received by several officers, and the faces of the group on Captain Lane's piazza were studies.

"Did the orderly take one to him, do you know?" asked Mr. Lee, with a world of pent-up indignation in his tone.

"One!" answered the major; "one! the insult wouldn't be complete without it. I think there were a dozen papers, marked copies, in his name."

"Has no one gone to see him?" asked Mrs. Lane, her sweet face full of sorrow.

"The captain was there when the mail came; so was Mr. Wallace," answered Miss Marshall, in low tones. "He seemed to anticipate something of the kind."

"This will have a tendency to make Hearn rather homesick, I fancy," drawled Martin, after a solemn pause. "I never quite appreciated the benefit of Southern institutions before."

"Sick, I admit,—sick at heart, sick of his cherished profession, perhaps; but why homesick, Martin?" queried the major.

"Oh, only because down South they shoot a man who publishes an outrageous slander like that, and the jury brings in a verdict of justifiable homicide."

IX.

The afternoon was lovely and full of sunshine. Thanks to the startling and sensational disclosures in the *Palladium*, the post had become an object of unusual interest to the surrounding populace, and, as the hour for dress-parade approached, vehicles of every description came streaming across the bridge, and before the trumpet sounded "first call" the road in front of the officers' quarters was well filled with carriages, buggies, carry-alls, and light wagons, while some enterprising livery-stable-keeper had fitted up a few open stages and placarded them with inscriptions setting forth that "To the Fort and back only a quarter" was a luxury now within the reach of everybody.

The populace was beginning to gather as the cavalry officers came sauntering back from the stables, and Mr. Abrams, of Chicago, again alighted from his buggy with an air that fully conveyed his appreciation of the fact that he was the popular hero of the moment,—the daring journalist who had bearded the lion in his den, had publicly denounced the brutality of these arrogant wearers of straps and swords, and had even brought to the bar of justice one of their number. There was the utmost curiosity to see the representative of the *Palladium*, and that eminent journalist, true to his principles of conforming with the views and wishes of the public, graciously accorded every opportunity. It was in passing this gentleman, surrounded by a gaping party of Central citizens, that the colonel somewhat ostentatiously called out, "Orderly, give my compliments to the adjutant, and say that, in view of the presence of so many gentlemen and ladies from town, I desire him to have the band ordered out at once," and went on his way amidst such audible evidences of popular approval as, "Ah! that's business!" "Ain't he a Jim Dandy?" "That's my candidate for Brigadier!" "He ain't no stuck-up second lieutenant!" And the poor devils of bandsmen, just seating themselves at their supper of hot potato-stew and coffee, were compelled to drop the savory bowls, and hastily button their full uniforms over their anything-but-full stomachs and march forth upon the parade to entertain the populace until the rest of the show was ready. If but now an apoplectic stroke were to create a vacancy among the brigadiers, Morris's star might indeed be in the ascendant.

It had been the custom of the ladies at Captain Lane's to appear on the piazza about the time that the officers came up from evening stables, and, reinforced by the Whartons, next door, and sometimes by other fair ones, to serve a fragrant cup of tea to such of their regimental friends as had time to drop in. To-day, too, the cosey little tables had been set upon the veranda, but the close proximity of the southwest gate, through which all the teams came driving in, and the rude stares of the occupants of the various vehicles, speedily drove the ladies away; and Sam Ling, the Chinaman, an old retainer of Lane's, was busily carrying the pretty china within-doors again and lamenting in voluble "pidgin" the coating of dust which had been received, when the captain walked by, with Hearn at his side. In vain Mrs. Lane called to him from the door-way to bring in any one who would come. He shook his head and walked on, talking gravely and earnestly with his younger friend. Miss Marshall, standing at the window, noted the inexpressible sadness and distress in Hearn's once buoyant, handsome face. He had grown years older in one day, she thought; all the color had fled from his sun-tanned cheeks, and the light from his brave blue eyes; yet there was a gleam in them, as he bent his head to talk with his friend the captain, that spoke of the smouldering fire within. She had thought him grossly wronged in the occurrences of the previous day, but it was the coming of the *Palladium* on the noon train that capped the climax. Omitting all the ingenious and alluring head-lines, condensing the sensational details in which the correspondent had worked up the case, Lieutenant Hearn stood accused before the whole United States of having forcibly ejected from the reservation a highly-respectable business-man who had vainly importuned him to pay the sum he for years had owed the estate of the former post trader, "most of it borrowed money to help him out of gambling scrapes," and had at last ventured to press his claim in person, only to be met with outrage and insult. There could be no doubt of the truth, said the correspondent: the books were open to the whole world, if need be, and the sum involved exceeded five hundred dollars.

Georgia Marshall, gazing at the pair from the lace-draped window, clasped her shapely white hands in deep perplexity. The slander, the scandal, the wrong, was spread world-wide; a refutation could never overtake it, even with the proofs of utter innocence at hand, and where were they?

It was some comfort at least that he should look up, and, as though in search of one friendly face, search the window with his sad blue eyes. He should feel that, no matter what the press might say and the Jews might swear to, more than one among his friends believed in him through thick and thin. Her dark eyes were full of sorrow and sympathy, and yet flashing with scorn of his defamer. And it was this picture of her face, framed by those shimmering curtains and by the trailing, twining tendrils of smilax that hung thickly about the window, that suddenly met his troubled gaze, and that he carried in his memory day and night long, long after.

Half an hour later the orderly came hurrying to Captain Lane's quarters with a note, and then ran on down to the stables.

"This will settle the question for you, Mabel," said Lane, who was getting into parade uniform. "Colonel Lawler comes on the sunset train, and Colonel Morris writes to know whether we cannot excuse him, or whether, perchance, there should be room for one more."

"Oh, Fred, and we've got to say yes, for Mr. Hearn won't come," answered Mrs. Mabel, with grief in her eyes. "We've got to say, 'Bring him by all means;' and yet how I hate to have our pretty dinner spoilt! If the train could only be late!"

"That would spoil it still more, Mabel, for then your—— Oh!" said the captain, suddenly recollecting himself, and turning back to his particular little shaving-mirror, before which he began busily arranging the loop of his gold helmet cord.

"For then?" exclaimed pretty Mrs. Lane, speeding across the space between her toilet-table and her liege-lord's shaving-corner, and laying her white hands upon his shoulder-knots and gazing up into his half-averted face with sparkling eyes,—"For then, you dear old—— You haven't sent East for flowers?"

"Perhaps it was some other fellow, then," said the captain, dubiously.

"Oh, Fred, you darling! I hadn't hoped for anything half so lovely. Will they be here on this train, really? That's why you didn't want dinner served until so late, was it? Georgia and I were saying, just now, if we only had a few flowers the table would be perfect. I must run and tell her." And impulsively she raised her soft lips to his face and kissed him enthusiastically. "You are so thoughtful, Fred!"

"Very," he responded, with much gravity of mien. "And that's what prompted me to suggest to your ladyship the propriety of throwing a wrapper over those snowy shoulders. The orderly has left the hall door open, and all Central City seems out here to-night. There goes the 'assembly,' and your train should be here in fifteen minutes. I suppose I can tell the colonel as he drives past on the way down to meet him?"

Ordinarily the announcement of the advent of some such high functionary as the judge-advocate of the division would have been quite sufficient to induce the colonel to turn over the command at parade to Major Kenyon and to go forthwith to meet the coming man. But here was the *élite* of Central City, as well as a strong delegation of the masses, gathered to see the garrison, and Morris particularly prided himself upon the soldierly grace and style with which he presided at the most stately ceremony of the military day. If he were to fail to appear at the head of his troops, if all that line of officers were to march to the front and salute Major Kenyon instead of him, people might really get the idea that it was the infantry field-officer who was the post commander, not himself. No. In all the yellow radiance of his cavalry plumage Morris strode forth from his veranda and stood revealed in the rays of the westering sun. His orderly hastened through the groups on the gravelled road in front, and, halting, raised his hand in picturesque salute, the eyes of Central City looking on:

"The colonel's messages are delivered, and the carriage will be at the station."

"Very well, Brooks. Now you yourself go down and be on the lookout for Colonel Lawler, a tall, sandy-haired, sandy-bearded man, rather slender, nearly sixty years of age; report to him, and get his baggage into the wagonette and bring him here to my quarters, and say that I would have met him, but was detained at parade."

Again the orderly saluted, then faced about and strode away through the swarm of curious eyes which followed him a moment, then turned once more upon the gorgeous and gleaming proportions of the warrior putting on his white leather gloves and buttoning them at the wrist with much deliberation. Mrs. Morris being in her own room arraying herself for the Lane dinner-party, and the veranda being vacant, he then called to his adjutant, who came along the pathway at the moment, a vision of floating yellow plume and brilliant aiguillette, and after a moment's conversation with his chief that young gentleman made his way to where a couple of town carriages were drawn up along the edge of the parade and presented the colonel's compliments to the occupants, the ladies of the postmaster's and leading banker's households, inviting them to bring their friends and come and sit on his piazza. Mr. Abrams, of Chicago, who was at the moment the centre of a knot of men, young and old, quitted their society, and, with his customary deliberation, sauntered over, opened the colonel's gate, and with careless ease of manner accosted that official, "Fine evening, colonel," and then lowered himself into the nearest chair just as the officer, with a face that flushed unmistakably, excused himself, passed him by, and hastened down the steps to greet the entering ladies, while the adjutant, hurrying on to where his sergeant-major was awaiting him at the edge of the greensward, signalled the band, and the stirring notes of "adjutant's call," followed by the burst of martial strains in swinging six-eight time, heralded the coming of the troops of the whole command.

Company after company, the cavalry from the west, the infantry from the east end of the quadrangle came marching forth upon the level green carpet, seemingly intermingling in confusion as they neared the centre, yet unerringly and unhesitatingly marching onward, until presently, with the solid blue-and-white battalion in the centre, and with the yellow-plumed helmets of the cavalry parading afoot on both flanks, the long statuesque line stretched nearly half-way across the longest axis of the quadrangle. Company after company the white-gloved hands clasped in front of each man as its commander ordered, "Parade rest," and Colonel Morris himself, who had with much deliberate dignity of manner marched out in front of the centre, now stood in solitary state with folded arms and glanced quickly along the motionless line, while back of him some thirty yards, all along the edge of the parade, in buggies, carry-alls, 'busses, in long sombre rank afoot, Central City looked admiringly on. For a moment the main interest seemed to centre on Lieutenant Hearn, and fingers could be seen pointed, and voices heard announcing, "That's him," as he stood, tall and erect, in front of the troop he was commanding in old Blauvelt's absence.

With flourish of trumpets and three resounding ruffles the band

swept out from the right front, and then all eyes were suddenly greeted by an unaccustomed sight. On the troops, long schooled in military etiquette, the effect was not at the time apparent,—neither by word nor sign was there indication that anything unusual had occurred; but in the populace, long accustomed to individual visits to the fort and to observation of its military requirements, "Keep off the grass" and by no means intrude upon the space reserved for military exercises, the sensation was immediate. Elbowing his way through the crowd standing at the edge of the parade-ground, with cigar tip-tilted in his mouth, his light spring overcoat thrown back, with the same cool deliberation that characterized all his movements the representative of the *Palladium* sauntered forth upon the sacred precincts, and, never hesitating until he had almost reached the commanding officer, presently came to a species of "parade rest" of his own, half sitting on the backs of his hands, which were supported on the knob of his massive cane, and there coolly surveyed the proceedings from the very spot reserved for the adjutant, one yard to the rear and three to the left of the commanding officer.

Some of the soldiers in ranks, unable to repress their merriment at the sight of so unusual a breach of etiquette, could not refrain from tittering. The voices of the file-closers could almost be heard in stern, low-toned reproach: "Stop that laughing, Murphy!" "Quiet, there, Duffy!" Morris himself could see that something unusual was going on, but, totally unconscious that his own official precincts were the scene of the solecism, never changed his position, but stood there statuesque, soldierly, and precise, all unconscious of his self-appointed staff-officer slouching behind him. As for Mr. Abrams, happy in the conviction that the people could not but look on and envy the proud prominence of the representative of the press, he appeared to have no other care than that of the criticism due the public of the martial exercises now taking place. That it was probably the colonel's intention to make a speech of some kind to his men, Mr. Abrams did not doubt, and that the *Palladium* should have every word of it he fully intended.

The band by this time was hammering half-way down the line, and the officer of the day, coming suddenly in the northwest gate from a visit to the guard, became aware that something was exciting the merriment of the few men on the verandas of the cavalry quarters, and then caught sight of this strange figure out on the parade. He looked hurriedly about in search of the colonel's orderly, but Brooks, as we have seen, had already gone on his missiou to the station. Not a soul was there to whom he could intrust the duty, yet he knew he could not allow such a breach of military propriety to occur right under his eyes. There seemed no help for it; he had to go himself; and, by no means liking his duty, Captain Cross, of the infantry, hastened out on the parade, and with the eyes of both lines upon him, though the heads of the troops remained scrupulously fixed to the front, he stepped up to Mr. Abrams, tapped him on the shoulder, and civilly said,—

"I beg your pardon, sir, but no one is allowed on the parade-ground. I shall have to trouble you to fall back to the road-way."

Mr. Abrams looked angrily around. What! Be compelled to quit his position?—to fall back in humiliation before all those people and meekly take his station among them, and actually to have to confess that, after all, a newspaper man wasn't the monarch of all he surveyed? Never!

"I'm here in the interests of the journal I represent, and I have full authority from the commanding general to inspect anything at this post," was his instant answer, accompanied by a shrug of his shoulders and an ugly scowl.

"I cannot help that," was Cross's cool yet civil reply. "You can see just as well from the edge of the parade, and here you will be in the way."

"I can't see it clear back there, and I mean to stay where I can see and hear. If there's anything I don't understand, I wish to be where Colonel Morris can explain."

Thanks to the banging of the band, all this was inaudible to the colonel, who remained in blissful ignorance of the colloquy taking place so near him.

"You cannot stay here, sir," was the firm, low-toned answer. "I will take pains to explain everything to you after you retire some twenty yards, but I trust you will not make it necessary for me to be more imperative. Come, sir."

And so, with the worst possible grace, Mr. Abrams had to give ground, and, accompanied by the officer of the day, fall back to the general throng. To cover his mortification as much as possible, Cross, in a smiling and courteous manner, went on to explain the purpose and details of the parade. But Abrams only turned angrily away. Twice he essayed to stop and face about, but Cross was getting his blood up by this time, and determinedly marched along to the very edge of the tittering line of towns-people, and there, raising his cap, said, with the utmost civility,—

"And now, sir, if I can be of the faintest assistance in making this ceremony clear to you, command me. You will observe that the adjutant is coming out to occupy the very position you were in."

But Mr. Abrams was in the sulks, as was to be expected, and still more wrathfully turned his back, refusing to listen, so that Cross promptly left him to his own devices. The representative of the *Palladium* had sense enough not to attempt to resume his place, but he had lost interest in the performance simultaneously with his own loss of prestige among the crowd, and so, after a moment's wavering, he turned about, and shouldered his sullen way toward his buggy, only stopping long enough to inquire of a civilian the name of the officer.

"Cross, eh? Captain Cross. Sure of that, are you? All right; I'll fix him," he growled between his set teeth as he strode away.

When a few moments later the long line of officers halted in front of the colonel and raised their hands in simultaneous salute, he responded with something less than his customary graceful deliberation, and inquired,—

"What on earth was going on there, that there was so much gig-

gling in ranks? It was mainly in front of you, Mr. Martin. Have you been attempting any witticisms, sir?"

"Not that I can now recall, colonel," responded Martin, with his usual drawl. "Possibly the appearance of our Chicago friend in the *rôle* of adjutant was what prompted their merriment. If you invited him to accompany you, I trust you will excuse it."

"Whom do you mean, and what do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Abrams took post on your left and rear, sir, until Cross invited him elsewhere. I'm sorry for Cross: he has a wife and family, and yonder goes the gentleman, bound for the telegraph-office, no doubt. What won't the *Palladium* say now?"

"You don't mean he was right here by me during parade?" said Morris, growing very red.

"Certainly, sir," spoke Captain Brodie. "You could have smelt his cigar if the wind hadn't been blowing from the stables."

But the appearance of the wagonette whirling into garrison with the tall form of Colonel Lawler, a dust-colored figure from the crown of his felt hat down to his very boots, put an end to further remarks. Morris hastened to meet his guest, merely nodding response to Lane's courteous invitation to bring him to dinner.

X.

Captain Lane's quarters, as has been said, were charmingly furnished, and adorned with attractive pictures and bric-à-brac. The dining-room was small, as dining-rooms generally are in army garrisons, but by dint of moving out the stove which until now had cumbered one corner, and then crowding the sideboard into its place, sufficient room had been gained to admit of extending the table diagonally and seating fourteen people thereat. And now, with the curtains drawn, but the soft evening breeze playing through the open casement and the broad hallway, in the soft yet brilliant light of dozens of wax candles set in sconces on the walls or in heavy candelabra on the damask-covered board, a merry party had gathered for one of the "lovely dinners" for which Mrs. Lane was already famous. Three of the infantry captains were present, with their wives. Pretty Jeannette McCrea, who was visiting the Burnhams, was escorted in by Dr. Ingersoll, popularly reputed to be an intractable bachelor, yet privately believed to be melting beneath the tenderness of that young lady's sweet blue eyes; and Georgia Marshall found herself sitting *vis-à-vis* with Mrs. Brodie, a somewhat portly matron, who seemed capable of imbibing information through every pore and storing it for further use, and yet at the same time imparting new and startling opinions on all current topics with intensified volubility. Her eyes took in every detail of the tasteful appointments of the table. Her nostrils inhaled the fragrance of the roses and carnations lavished on every hand. Her lips parted to receive the succulent little clam—rare and unaccustomed luxury west of the Missouri, yet easily expressed from St. Louis—and to give utterance at the same instant to liveliest comments upon the unusual feature of that evening's parade. It was not until after soup and the tiny thimbleful

of sherry that audible conversation seemed to extend beyond her, and then Miss Marshall, who had been endeavoring to entertain Captain Brodie and distract his mind from contemplation of his better half's undaunted conversational powers, found herself addressed by the gentleman on her right:

"And so you are from Cincinnati, Miss Marshall, and paying your first visit to the West? Now, what do you think of the army?"

"Pardon me, Colonel Lawler, but isn't that a trifle like the query we are said to propound to Englishmen who have just landed?—How do you like America?"

"But I inferred that you had been here long enough to form an opinion."

"To form one vaguely, perhaps, but probably not long enough to subject it to the test of experience."

"And do you never express opinions until assured of their justice? Really, Miss Marshall, I must compliment you on such wisdom and discretion. You should have been a lawyer."

"Yes, colonel?—and that, I understand, is your profession. Now I am indeed complimented."

Colonel Lawler's eyes had been wandering about the table as he spoke, but now he turned suddenly and suspiciously upon the girl at his side. He was a man of singular mental mould. He had been a clerk in the office of his uncle, a prominent lawyer in the distant East; had had merely a common-school education, and was laboriously reading law, when his patron found himself suddenly called upon to assume responsible duties at the national capital, and hastened thither, taking his clerk with him. Lawler at that time was nearly thirty-five, and had not yet been called to the bar. It was the third year of the great war. His patron soon found that the requirements of his office were such that a man of far higher attainments would be needed as secretary, and, being thrifty and unwilling to pay the salary of a clerk out of his own pocket, he decided on the not unusual expedient of shunting him off on a paternal government. Lawler had no idea whatever of entering the army as one of the fighting force, but the proposition of his uncle was almost dazzling. He wasn't much of a lawyer, to be sure, but quite good enough for the purpose, said the old gentleman to himself. And so it resulted that the green New-Englander was transferred to a clerkship in the bureau of military justice, and speedily blossomed out as a major and judge-advocate of volunteers, with station in the city of Washington. The first thing the excellent fellow did, after getting his uniform and sword, was to post off to the Granite State and marry the middle-aged maiden who for ten years had been patiently waiting the day when he could accumulate enough money to buy a little home, and, with his bride, he returned to honest toil at the department. No man ever worked harder to master the details of unaccustomed duties, and no man, probably, ever encountered greater difficulties. But such was his perseverance that he became a walking glossary of information on army legal affairs. It was not that he ever mastered the niceties of martial jurisprudence, but he knew the inside history of every case that came up for trial in the bulky records of the bureau. He could quote

the charges and specifications preferred against any and every officer, the findings of the court, the names of the principal witnesses, of the judge-advocate and the members, and little by little the seniors in the office had grown so to lean upon his memory and his opinion that he became an almost indispensable feature. And so when Peace once more spread her wings over the troubled walls of the Capitol, and the army was sent home, and a chosen few were retained from the million of volunteers to close up the records and accounts of that vast establishment, the bureau announced that it couldn't get along without Major Lawler, and Lawler was shrewd enough to see his way to a life-position. With the brevet of lieutenant-colonel for faithful and meritorious services during a war in which he had not once heard the whistle of a bullet, he was presently announced as transferred to the permanent establishment and duly commissioned one of the array of officers of the regular army.

At this time his sole acquaintance with the gentlemen with whom his future lot was to be cast was what he had derived from the court-martial proceedings which for three years he had spent ten to twelve hours a day in reviewing; and, knowing them through that medium alone, it became somewhat difficult for him to estimate them through any other when at last he was ordered to duty at a far-Western city as judge-advocate of a division. He had been so many years within the shadow of the War Department that army life in any other shape looked to him as might a strange garret to an exiled cat. When he met an officer for the first time his mind reverted to the records which he had reviewed: this was not the man who led the assault on Bloody Angle at Spottsylvania, who planted the first colors on the heights of Mission Ridge, who made the perilous night ride to Crook after the disaster of the Little Horn, but the officer who preferred the charges against Colonel Blank, or who was tried for duplicating pay-accounts at Nashville, or who was the unwilling witness in the case of old Barry at Fort Fetterman. To his pragmatical mind every soldier was a past or prospective figurant before a court-martial, and long contemplation of innumerable counts in the shape of specifications had so charged his mind with distrust of his fellow-men that, whatsoever might be his rank or record, no officer stood so high as to be above suspicion, none so impregnable that, judiciously handled, a court could not down him. "I consider it my bounden duty," he had once said, "to convict an officer if I possibly can." And while in his regard an acquittal might temporarily and partially vindicate the party accused, it must forever blight the fair fame of the judge-advocate who tried the case.

Some years of rubbing had so far modified his original views as to teach him that until charges were actually preferred it was not well to look upon any of his new associates as actually and absolutely attainted. But, once that formality had been accomplished, *primâ facie* evidence of guilt was firmly established, and only with reluctance and inward, if not active, rebellion could he bring himself to accept a verdict otherwise. Proceedings of courts which convicted he skimmed through with lenient eye; there could be no error there. But when, as was his invariable custom, he glanced at the findings before beginning the

review, and there discovered the unwelcome words "not guilty," no vigilance could exceed that with which he scrutinized every line of the record, hoping anywhere to light upon a flaw. Friends in the service at large he neither sought nor made. Secure in his position, abstemious, frugal, and even niggardly, he had no small vices on which to trip. Life to him was one long contemplation of the failings of his fellow-men.

And this was the gentleman who, being on some temporary investigation within the lines of the department, had received telegraphic orders to proceed at once to Ryan and look into the matters thus loudly heralded by the press. Standing not upon the order of his going, he had taken the first train, and reached the post at nightfall, eager to begin. It was a source of positive discomfort to him to find that he was expected by the post commander to dine at Captain Lane's; but his uneasiness was in no wise due to the lack of proper apparel. The colonel and the other officers were in full uniform, as was army custom then, before a merciful and level-headed general authorized the wearing of civilian evening dress on such occasions. But Colonel Lawler was quite at ease in a travelling-suit of rusty tweeds. Morris had offered the colonel the use of his own dress-suit, and in fact had rather urged it, as due to Mrs. Lane, but Lawler promptly replied that Mrs. Lane must have known when she asked him that he did not travel around on military duty with a spike-tailed coat, and declared that he thought it all unnecessary. "Spike-tailed coats are too high-toned for me, anyhow. I never see a man in one but what he reminds me of some butler I've seen in Washington." Morris said no more, but Mrs. Morris had looked volumes, and it was very ruefully indeed that the colonel presented his visitor to their gracious hostess. Dinner was announced almost immediately, and, ignoring for the time-being the young lady whom he had taken in on his arm, Lawler sat for some minutes looking in no little surprise about him. The sight of so much elegance at a frontier table could only convey to his mind the vague impression of peculation in the past. He was surprised to find that Lane could have had no connection whatever with "cotton cases" during the war.

And now was this young girl with the big dark eyes, looking so frankly yet scrutinizingly up into his face, quizzing him? The fact that for nearly a quarter of a century he had been a commissioned officer and was now high in rank, if not in public esteem, had given him a certain self-confidence of manner, and the consciousness of being the custodian of a host of official secrets added to his sense of self-importance. Yet, small and suspicious by nature, he was forever looking for some covert ridicule. He had come to the board a total stranger to Captain and Mrs. Lane, yet he felt a certain sense of superiority to them because he could, were he so disposed, tell that young matron a host of ugly things about her first husband. Of Lane himself he knew little or nothing beyond the fact that the proceedings of courts-martial of which he had served as judge-advocate were always correct. That he was known in the fighting force of the army as a brilliant and gallant soldier, who had been through many a hard campaign and had

twice or thrice been wounded, was of no avail in Lawler's eyes. That might be a very proper thing in its way, but did not interest him. Just now he was casting up in his mind the probable cost of the dainty feast and wondering what means Lane had outside his pay. Miss Marshall, being from Cincinnati, would doubtless know something, and he proposed to put her on the witness-stand forthwith, but, lawyer-like, to lead up to the matter by adroit circumlocution. Yet at the first clumsily-essayed compliment she had looked up into his face, a merry light in her big, dark, scrutinizing eyes, and he became instantly suspicious that she was quizzing him. Lawler reddened at the very thought.

"You seem to have a very correct appreciation of the legal profession," he said, however, with an effort at a gallant bow. "Most young women, I fancy, are far more partial to that of a soldier, for instance."

"Most women, you know, admire courage and truth and straightforwardness, colonel."

"And you mean that these are more frequent in the army—that is, among the—the officers of the line—than in the legal profession, I suppose. Now, Miss Marshall, a celebrated chief justice, from whom you may be descended, as you bear the same name, was the embodiment of all these traits."

"And his mantle fell on the shoulders of many, I doubt not, colonel; but—was it big enough to go round?"

"I'm afraid you're satirical, Miss Marshall," said Lawler, with a superior smile. "You young ladies not infrequently see only the glamour and froth of army characteristics. We who have spent many years in the endeavor to keep the army straight cannot look upon the officers quite as partially as you do. We see both sides of the double lives led by so many of the 'youngsters' in the line."

"Only by the line, colonel, and by the young officers? Then who looks after the staff, and the elders?" And Miss Marshall's face was bubbling over with fun.

"They have stood the test of years, Miss Marshall, and need no guardian, as do these young fellows who so captivate school-girls," answered Lawler, shifting uneasily in his chair. "Now, Mrs. Brodie has a mature conception of their merits and defects. She was speaking of this very case of Mr. Hearn's a moment ago.—You seem to have known him quite a while, Mrs. Brodie. Were you ever stationed together?"

"My! no, Colonel Lawler: only one cannot help hearing things," answered Mrs. Brodie, totally unaware of the facial contortions of her better half, who was helplessly, hopelessly striving to catch her eye and restrain her tongue. "Everybody in town seems to think he was such a popular young fellow; only, don't you know, so careless."

Colonel Morris and everybody at Mrs. Lane's end of the table happened to be deep in general chat at the moment, and neither saw nor heard anything of this sudden introduction of personal affairs at a social occasion. But Mrs. Morris lost no time. She saw Brodie's glowering eyes across the board; she noted Lawler's keen, shrewd gaze, and the troubled look that flashed over Lane's kindly face, and had

just time to whisper to him, "How can you ever forgive us for bringing the man? The colonel was in misery at the idea. He said he knew he would be talking 'shop' before dinner was half over. I can check Mrs. Brodie, at any rate." Then, aloud, "Pardon me, Colonel Lawler," and now her face was wreathed in sweetest smiles, "I'm not going to let Mrs. Brodie prejudice you against one of my prime favorites."

"Oh, indeed, Mrs. Morris," protested Mrs. Brodie, "I wouldn't think of such a thing. I was just going to point out to the colonel the very great difference between what he might have been then and what he has been ever since he joined the Eleventh."

"But the point at issue seems to be what he was then, as Mrs. Brodie puts it," said Lawler.

"But I wouldn't for the world have you suppose I thought Mr. Hearn had done anything that was ungentlemanly. I'm only saying what rumor was," burst in Mrs. Brodie again, who had at last caught the signals on her husband's face, and now only sought to excuse her own impetuosity, even though in so doing she more deeply involved the young gentleman himself. "I can't bear to hear such things said of him without any one to defend him; but what can one do?"

This was getting simply unbearable. While all at the other end of the table were having a merry, laughing chat, here was this professional investigator—an accidental and by no means welcome guest—taking advantage of the circumstances and of the well-known volubility of Mrs. Brodie to start her on the subject which called him to the post, and striving at a social party to "pick up points."

"By Jove!" muttered Captain Cross, "he's as bad as Mr. Abrams himself. What can we do to stop him? Nothing short of Divine Providence will ever stop Mrs. Brodie."

But the desired interposition came. Footsteps were heard on the piazza beyond the hall. The Chinaman, answering the summons to the door, came back, raising the portière that hung heavily over the entrance, and handed his master a card. Lane took it, and glanced quickly at Colonel Lawler.

"If you will excuse me," said the latter, rising at once, "these are gentlemen whom I telegraphed to meet me, and I will save time by seeing them here. I will just ask them into your parlor, Captain Lane." And, quitting the room, he passed through the hall-way and met his untimely callers at the door. Sam came shuffling back an instant after, having gone to turn up the parlor lights, and Miss Marshall, glancing over her left shoulder as the portière was again raised, saw that one of the men thus introduced beneath the captain's roof was the German Jew, Schönberg. Lane, busy in striving to restore the tone of general chat, did not see them at all.

It was an hour later. The ladies had risen and betaken themselves to the front piazza; the men remained to smoke a cigar with their host. The absence of the legal luminary, oddly enough, had dispelled the atmosphere of gloom that hung for a few minutes about the lower end of the table. He and his strange visitors were still closeted, so to speak, in the parlor, but now they came forth. In some mysterious

way every woman had by this time learned that Mr. Schönberg was there, and at the sound of the opening parlor door and of the mellifluous accents of that gentleman's voice they instinctively huddled to the other end of the piazza. Lawler walked with the two men as far as the gate, and, when they finally disappeared in the direction of the store, came sauntering back to join the ladies.

"As I don't smoke," he said, "I will take my enjoyment here. Where shall I sit?"

"Take this chair, Colonel Lawler," said Miss Marshall, noting the aversion with which all the others of the party had become inspired. "May I send for coffee for you?"

"Miss Marshall, I have no small vices. I never drink anything stronger than milk; never smoke; never chew; never swear."

"Never even swear, colonel?"

"Never. What is it you are smiling at?"

"Have you ever read the works of Josh Billings, Colonel Lawler?"

"I have no time to waste on nonsense, Miss Marshall. And I never could see anything funny or witty in such men as Billings and Artemus Ward."

"Well, it wasn't his fun I was thinking of quite so much just now as his insight into character," said the young lady, musingly, as she still gravely looked him over with her big eyes.

Two young officers came strolling along the walk at the moment, and, passing beneath the lamp, raised their caps in salutation to the ladies. Miss Marshall nodded and smiled with marked cordiality.

"All wasted, Miss Marshall: they could not see it."

"No, colonel, and I particularly wanted one of them at least to do so. Now, that's a part of the army that I decidedly like."

"Who are they, may I ask?"

"Mr. Wallace and his especial friend, Mr. Hearn."

"And is it possible that you find such young men to your taste? I gave you credit for having rather a higher standard."

"But it is their standard that I so much admire, Colonel Lawler. I don't suppose anything would tempt either of those young men to say or do a mean or cowardly thing."

"No?" said the colonel, with a superior smile; "and yet, do you know, I'm ready to stake my professional reputation that one of them at least is quite unworthy your trust or confidence."

"Now, are you not a trifle prejudiced, colonel? I thought the law presumed a man innocent until proved guilty."

"Theoretically, yes; practically, men who have studied human nature through the courts, as I have had to, get to see through the veneering of high tone that these 'youngsters' are so apt to assume."

"And so you are probably quite ready to agree with the correspondent of the *Palladium*, colonel, that most officers are frauds, especially the second lieutenants?"

"My experience has certainly not given me a high opinion of the young men, Miss Marshall."

"And, now, do you know, colonel, my intuition is very much in their favor."

"But is your intuition as well founded, do you think, as long legal experience?"

"Well, your experience has been confined to the limited few that have come before courts-martial, has it not? My intuition covers the great array of their number,—the ninety-and-nine. Now, I haven't any especial knowledge of the matter you seem to be investigating, Colonel Lawler, but I fancy that evidence such as Mr. Schönberg might give would have little weight before a court of intelligent men."

"You will change your mind when you come to see the books, young lady."

"Have you changed yours?"

"No: they simply confirmed my judgment."

"Then my intuition was right, colonel."

"How so, may I ask?"

"It told me that you had prejudged the case."

At this moment the officers came sauntering out into the open air, joining the group of ladies, who had fled back to the western end of the piazza as soon as they saw their obnoxious visitor safely anchored by Miss Marshall's side.

"Where's Lawler?" queried Morris, in no pleasant tone. "Has he gone off with those fellows?"

"No; I'm here, colonel, getting a lesson in law which this young lady is so good as to give me." Miss Marshall flushed at the discourtesy in his tone, but gave no other sign. "I shall expect to see you appearing in the *rôle* of counsellor yet, Miss Marshall."

"Very well, colonel; if it ever comes to that I shall fall back on my intuition."

Miss Marshall's cheeks were still flushed and her eyes had a dangerous gleam under their dark and fringing lashes when she stepped a moment after into the lately-desecrated parlor.

"You appear to have had quite a tilt with our friend the judge-advocate," said Lane, who had come in for more cigars for his guests. "I think I once told you I would not care to be cross-examined by you, Miss Marshall; and it looks as though he were not a little nettled."

"I hope I haven't been rude to a guest of yours, Captain Lane; but that gentleman makes me wish over and over again that I were a man. Did you know who his callers were?"

"I have just heard," said Lane.

There was sudden lull in the conversation on the piazza without, then the colonel spoke quickly:

"I wonder what that can be. That fellow yells in earnest, doesn't he?"

"What is it?" asked Lane, stepping to the door.

"Number Eight yelling for the corporal of the guard. Yonder they go."

Captain Cross, who was officer of the day, had quietly picked up his sword and hurried out of the southwest gate, while down the roadway could be heard the sound of rapid foot-falls. The call, however, was not repeated. Conversation soon became brisk and general, and in five minutes Cross came back.

"What was the matter?" asked Colonel Morris.

"Some civilians, sir, and one of our men, in a buggy, who said they came out by order of the general commanding the division, and had been detained here until after taps."

"Certainly; that's all right. Those were doubtless the witnesses Colonel Lawler sent for. Why wasn't the corporal of the guard sent down with them to pass them out?"

"Their buggy was tied the other side of the store, sir, and no one at the guard-house could see them start."

"Well, the sentry ought to have let them go anyhow, as soon as he saw who they were. We have no authority to hold civilians here."

"It wasn't the civilians the sentry was after, sir; he was perfectly willing they should go; but they had an enlisted man with them."

"Who?" asked Morris, with uncomfortable premonition of the answer.

"Private Welsh, sir, of C troop."

XI.

The week that followed the advent at Fort Ryan of the staff-officer from division head-quarters was one that the good people at the post have not yet ceased talking about. Lawler had remained in the garrison only twenty-four hours, and went back eastward without a word as to his intentions, and, to the surprise of even Colonel Morris, without having sent for or spoken to the man most interested in his coming, —Lieutenant Hearn. This in itself was something that excited most unfavorable comment, for it was known that he had had long interviews with Mr. Abrams, the busy representative of the press, and that he had driven in town to spend some hours in questioning certain dubious-looking citizens presented to him one by one at the establishment of Mr. Schönberg. He had furthermore sent to the guard-house for Trooper Welsh,—once again there incarcerated by order of Captain Cross, who as officer of the day had arrested him for attempting to slip across sentry's post the previous night. And once again, to the dismay of the cavalry officers and the unconcealed ridicule of the infantry battalion, Colonel Morris had directed Welsh's immediate release.

"It was a misunderstanding, probably, Captain Cross," said the colonel, in conciliatory mood, to the old officer of the day, as he relieved him after guard-mount. "Welsh was given to understand that these gentlemen, who had just come from an interview with Colonel Lawler, had the authority of the department commander to take him to town with them, so as to be ready to make certain depositions early in the morning."

But Cross eyed his commander unflinchingly and said no word.

Among the infantry officers the opinion was openly expressed that between Abrams and Lawler and Trooper Welsh the colonel was simply demoralized. The crowd at dress-parade for several evenings was almost as big as that before spoken of, and, though the *Palladium* man did not again take position on the colonel's left during the cere-

mony itself, he was frequently at that officer's side when he made his way through the curious throngs, both in going to and returning from his post. And afterwards, with the eyes of the towns-people upon them, Private Welsh and the unterrified correspondent paced up and down the road in front of the cavalry barracks for half an hour; and the group sitting on Lane's piazza one evening especially could not help noting how ostentatiously the two conversed as they neared the white wicket-gate.

"Wharton," quoth Martin, as for the sixth or seventh time the swarthy trooper and his champion approached the captain's quarters, "I'm consumed with envy. The time was when good-looking cavalrymen, like you and me, could command some small attention from the eyes of our friends and fellow-citizens in town; but our day is done. There are the popular heroes of the hour. Now, here comes Hearn's first sergeant. Surely he's not going to have the unbearable effrontery to remind Trooper Welsh that he ought to be cleaning up for guard to-morrow, when a gentleman of the press wants to talk with him?"

"Is Welsh for guard to-morrow?" asked Captain Lane, in some surprise.

"He is. The colonel relieved him from durance vile before guard-mount this morning, and I heard the first sergeant tell Hearn an hour ago that it was Welsh's turn for guard, and wanted to know whether he was to order him or not. Hearn said certainly."

"And the man cut parade to-night on plea that Mr. Abrams wanted to talk with him. He was the 'one private absent' reported from C troop," said Wharton. "That's the reason the sergeant is after him now, I fancy, either to arrest him, or else warn him for guard."

"If I were Hearn I'd quit attempting to discipline that young man," said Major Kenyon, pessimistic and glowering as ever. "He ought to have sense enough to know that the worst blackguard in the service, with the press behind him, is more than a match for any officer who seeks to do his duty."

"And if I were Hearn," drawled Martin, "I'd make that particular *protégé* of the *Palladium* do his duty, if I died for it, especially after the marked copies that came to-day. Now watch."

The first sergeant, a trim, soldierly fellow with determined face and manner and quick energetic step, had by this time overtaken the pair who, strolling together, had almost reached the picket fence and were within ear-shot of the Lanes' piazza. Mrs. Lane glanced eagerly up the road, for Miss Marshall and Lieutenant Hearn at that very moment came from the Whartons' quarters next door and appeared upon the gravel walk, Wallace following with Jeannette McCrea.

Sergeant Wren had stopped short on overtaking the trooper, and, with scant ceremony, addressed him in tones that all could hear:

"Welsh, you're for guard to-morrow, and you've got mighty little time in which to get ready. Did the lieutenant excuse you from parade?"

"I didn't ask him. Colonel Lawler was good enough for me."

"Colonel Lawler left the post at five o'clock, and couldn't have wanted you."

"All the same I was acting under his orders and nobody else's. If you want any other authority you can go to Colonel Morris: I'm busy now." And with his hands in his pockets, and a jerk of the head to his companion, Welsh whirled about and led the way down the road toward the store, Abrams slowly following in his wake, but looking back as though curious to see the sequel. The first sergeant stood an instant flushing and with wrathful eyes, but raised his hand in respectful salute as the young troop-commander came quietly along, Miss Marshall leaning on his arm.

"You warned him for guard, sergeant?" said Hearn, answering Wren's salute.

"Yes, sir; and he says Colonel Lawler excused him from parade."

"I reported the absence to Colonel Morris, and he tells me that there may have been some such understanding, sergeant. At all events, as Colonel Lawler has gone, he would give Welsh the benefit of the doubt: so we have nothing further to do with that matter."

Wren ground his teeth as he briskly strode back to his quarters.

"What does the loot'nant say?" demanded Duffy, as he with half a dozen of his comrades clustered about the office, eagerly watching the sergeant's face and his clinching hands, as he returned.

"Nothing. Don't ask questions now, you men. The lieutenant can't do anything to him; the colonel won't let him."

"The colonel won't, is it?" said Duffy, with a wrathful grin. "Be jabers, if I were colonel I'd command my rigiment, and no damned newspaper man would scare me out of it. It's the *Palladium* that commands Fort Ryan to-night, and that blackguard Welsh is post adjutant,—more shame to us all!"

"Silence, there, Duffy! No more of that talk!" ordered Wren, as he banged to the door of his own little den, and the knot of troopers scattered away. "All the same," muttered he to his faithful second, Sergeant Ross, "Duffy only tells the truth, and damn me if I ever thought the day would come when my old chief would knuckle down like that."

And if in garrison circles that night it was predicted that something would be the outcome of the detail of Welsh for guard-duty, no one was destined to disappointment. He appeared at the appointed time, and was curiously scanned by the other members of the troop, as, carbine in hand, he came slowly and indifferently down the stairway just as the trumpets began to sound the assembly of the details. Unluckily for everybody who hoped to see Welsh brought up with a round turn by the snappy young adjutant, a drizzling rain had set in, and undress guard-mounting in overcoats was the result. Welsh's forage-cap and accoutrements might pass muster in a shower, but his full-dress rig every man knew to be wofully out of shape, and such was the fellow's unpopularity among his comrades by this time that audible regrets were expressed by the men that the weather had "gone back on them."

"Step out, there!" shouted Wren sharply to the dawdling soldier, as he gave the command to fall in.

"Get a move on you, Misther Welsh," laughed Duffy from the upper gallery. "Or don't they ever shtep out in the excellent family

down East? Sure, isn't he a fine-looking, intelligent young man of twenty-five?"

"Twenty-five? 'Faith, it's thirty-six in months he'd get, if I was commanding," muttered Kerrigan. "How are your patriotic motives this morning, Mister American-Blood-with-the-Asshumed-Name?"

"Sure his name is Dennis," laughed Duffy again. "Quit your sneering, Kerrigan. The young soldier's eyes are blazing with pent-up feelings again, don't you see?" And indeed a most malignant scowl was that which Welsh launched aloft at his persecutors, whose fun was cut short by the stern voice of Sergeant Ross, ordering silence. And in another moment the detail of C troop was dancing away in double time, with a parting adjuration from Duffy not to go too fast: "it's too aisy to set the blood boiling in Welsh's veins, anyhow."

It was in the ugliest possible mood that Welsh tossed up his carbine for the inspection of the officer of the guard. He had expected to pose as a hero and martyr. But, whatever might be the mistaken sentiments aroused in the East by the efforts of a paper that had exhausted local well-springs of scandal and sensation, here among those who knew the facts, and, above all, knew him, he had gained only ridicule and contempt. In all the garrison, now that Goss was gone, there was not a soldier who had ever stood his friend. In his own troop especially, where the rank and file were devoted to their young lieutenant, there was wrath and indignation at his expense, and well he knew that nothing but discipline saved him from a ducking in the river or a hearty kicking down the barrack stairs. Still, with Abrams to stand by him and the *Palladium* to champion his cause, he felt secure against fate; only he had thought to be looked upon as liberator and leader among the men, and they were all laughing at him. This was bitter indeed. He almost hoped that the adjutant would order him back, replaced by the supernumerary, for the rust he knew to be about the breech-block of his carbine, and which the officer of the guard would be sure to discover. But the young lieutenant contented himself with pointing to it with white-gloved finger and passing on, probably thinking it best to get him on duty at any price.

All day long on guard the men had taken frequent occasion to declaim quotations from the *Palladium*, until by evening stables they had rung the changes on Welsh's excellent family connections, his American blood, his patriotic motives in enlisting, his ardor for the flag, and his fidelity to his oath, until he was ready to wish to heaven the *Palladium* had singled out anybody else to be the martyr for its preconcerted exposition of official tyranny in the army, and heartily sick of the part he had been induced to play.

But where, meantime, was Abrams? The day wore by, and not once had he come to the garrison, and Welsh, sulkily plodding up and down his muddy post near the stables, and knowing well that every time the men looked at him or nudged each other in the ribs they were guying him, had earnest desire to see his champion, and to prevent the publication of other letters they had projected, since the only effect, locally, of the assault upon the good name of his young officer was to bring down the indignation of the enlisted men upon himself. It only

made him rage the more spitefully against Hearn, and he longed for an opportunity to vent his spleen.

When the devil is working in the human breast, opportunity is seldom lacking. The evening gun had thundered, the last notes of "retreat" had died away, and the sun, that had been obscured all morning, went down in a golden radiance, leaving a sheen of beautiful color lingering along the crest of the opposite bluffs and reflected in myriad millions of rain-drops still clinging to the clumps of buffalo-grass. Tempted by the loveliness of the evening, Mrs. Lane had ordered out her carriage, and the moment the report had been made after retreat roll-call and Mr. Hearn was returning sadly to his own quarters, Lane headed him off:

"No. I'm going to take you away from Wallace and Martin to-night, and I don't mean to let old Kenyon get his hands on you again. Mrs. Lane and Miss Marshall want you to drive with us an hour or so; then we'll come back and have a quiet little bite just among ourselves." And Hearn pressed the captain's hand and silently thanked him.

Half a dozen of the guard were seated about the rough stone porch of the gloomy old guard-house as the carriage came rolling by, and at sight of the occupants they quickly laid aside their pipes and respectfully arose and raised their hands in salute. The sentry on No. 1, facing sharply to the front, brought his rifle to the carry with a snap that made the bayonet ring. The one man who remained seated and staring sulkily at the carriage wore the cavalry uniform: it was Welsh.

Both officers noticed the fact as they touched their caps in acknowledgment of the courtesy of the infantrymen, and exchanged significant glances. The ladies, too, were quick to note what had happened, and they, too, looked at each other and then somewhat anxiously at Hearn. But the carriage whirled along. The instant it had passed, Corporal Stein turned on Welsh. So did others of the guard.

"What do you mean by sitting there like that?" was the demand.

"I know my business," was the surly reply. "Just you 'tend to yours. You'd better study Tactics and Regulations before you try to learn me anything."

"Oh, do let the high-spirited scion of our finest families alone, corporal. Can't you see it's turning his stomach to be civil to anybody?" protested a tall infantryman.

"Ah, let up, now, on Mr. Welsh, *né* Mulligan—that's what they called ye in the Twenty-Third,—wasn't it Mulligan? Or was it Sullivan? Sure I know the family, and it's a foine one," protested Private Kelly, his blue eyes twinkling with fun.

Welsh sprang furiously to his feet, clinching his fist and making straight for the laughing little "dough-boy." That young Celt, though a head shorter than his dark antagonist, in no wise disconcerted, stood squarely facing him, and awaited the attack with a grin of genuine delight on his freckled face. Stein sprang forward, however, and interposed.

"No fighting here," he ordered. "Wait till you're off guard in the morning, and settle it then."

"Don't thwart the gentleman, corporal. Here comes his friend the police reporter," laughed the group of guardsmen. But the unusual chaff had summoned the officer of the guard to the spot, and at sight of the lieutenant every Irishman in the party assumed an instantaneous expression of preternatural innocence. Mr. Abrams, too, had reined up in front of the trader's store, a few yards away, and, noting the little knot of soldiers peering across the road, divined at once that something was going on, and so, with the instinct of his profession, hastened to the scene in time to catch a part of the colloquy that ensued.

"The corporal tells me the trouble grew out of your refusing to rise and salute when Captain Lane passed," said the officer of the guard, addressing the stalwart trooper.

Welsh glanced furtively over his shoulder until sure the *Palladium* man was in range of his voice, and then loudly replied,—

"I'm a member of the guard, sir, and the Regulations forbid guards paying compliments of any kind after 'retreat,' and I can show you the paragraph."

"You know perfectly well, Welsh, that that applies to the guard collectively when under arms, and not to individual members. I want no hair-splitting here. See to it that you pay proper courtesy to every officer while you're under my command." And the lieutenant, a young infantryman, with decidedly resolute face, looked squarely into the glowering black eyes of the trooper, and then, turning quietly toward his little office, his eye lighted on the *Palladium* man. For an instant it looked as though he had something to say to him too; but, struck by a sudden thought, he passed in without another word, and presently the sergeant of the guard appeared in the door-way. There was evident purpose in his coming.

Half an hour later Welsh was standing some twenty yards away, engaged in low-toned eager chat with his civilian friend. The faces of both men were clouded, and every little while the gypsy-looking soldier shot an angry glance toward the guard-house door. Presently they moved across the road and headed for the open bar at the trader's, wherein the lamps were just beginning to gleam. Before they reached its open portals, Corporal Stein was at their heels and his stern voice ordered Welsh to halt:

"Go back to the guard-house, Welsh: it's against orders for a member of the guard to leave it, and you know it as well as I do."

"My relief don't go on post for two hours yet, and this gentleman has business with me: you'd better not interfere with him."

"The gentleman can see you over there. You can't see him here."

Already the sergeant was striding across the road; the lieutenant appeared at the door; a dozen members of the guard were eagerly watching the scene. Welsh half turned. Mr. Abrams bent and muttered a few words in his ear, but the soldier, after one glance around him, shook his head. Slowly and reluctantly he turned.

"I'll get even with you for this, Stein," he hissed. And then, with shrugging shoulders, the two objects of general interest—the civilian and the enlisted man—slouched back across the road, the eyes of all upon them.

It was at this instant that the rapid whirr of wheels and the click of iron-shod hoofs were heard upon the drive, and briskly the Lane carriage came around the turn. Lieutenant Lewis stepped out from the door-way. Again the sentry faced the road and carried arms; again the soldiers of the guard arose, and those about the trader's door, also, faced the road-way; again the white-gloved hands were raised in soldierly salute, and one man only turned his back and slouched away. Every soldier within range saw that Welsh was determined to disobey the orders he had just received. In six giant leaps the tall sergeant had reached his side.

"Halt, Welsh, and face about," he thundered, and then, as the man still strove to edge away under the wing of his civilian associate, laid a brawny hand upon the hulking shoulder and spun him about as he would a top.

"Heels together, now. Look square at Captain Lane. Now, then, damn you, left hand, *salute.*"

"Not badly done, sergeant," said Lieutenant Lewis, a moment after, as with kindling eyes he reached the spot just as the carriage had flashed by.—"Finish what you have to say to your friend in fifteen minutes, Welsh, and then report to me at the guard-room."—"Not badly done," he repeated, as he turned away with the tall infantryman by his side; "only you shouldn't have said 'damn' in the presence of ladies, or," with a grim smile under his moustache, "or—of the press."

"The ladies couldn't hear, sir, and I meant that the press should. I know that according to 'Pinafore' and the *Palladium* I should have said, 'if you please.' But mules and blackguards pay no attention to politeness. I've been thirty years a soldier, sir, and I know what fetches them."

XII.

There were sore hearts at Ryan in the week that followed. As had long been anticipated, orders came for the summer practice march to the Indian Territory, and the Eleventh—band and all—had jogged away, leaving Major Kenyon to command the post, with his little battalion of infantry to guard it. The orders were received two days after Welsh's enlivening tour of guard-duty. The command was to march in forty-eight hours, equipped for field-service, and Lieutenant Hearn, with the other troop-commanders, was occupied every instant in getting his horses and men in thorough shape. Kenyon and Lane, after consultation among some of his friends, had induced the young fellow to promise not to open one of the marked copies of the newspapers which now began to crowd in with every mail, but to leave them all to be considered by the little council of three in whose hands he had been persuaded to rest his case. He had written a full denial of the *Palladium's* scandalous statements with regard to his financial entanglements, and a full description, as has already been told, of the original trouble at the trader's store with Private Welsh. These had both been duly handed to Colonel Morris in his office. No one had heard from Lawler. No one knew just exactly what disposition the colonel had

made of these papers. Mr. Abrams, too, had disappeared the day after Welsh's tour of guard-duty; but the whole garrison now was flooded with newspapers by the hundred. It would seem as if the guild of the Western press had resolved on a sudden and simultaneous assault on the army in general and as if Fort Ryan was the vortex of the storm. Sensational despatches were published from various quarters. Other journals, envious of the *Palladium's* exploit, unearthed other victims, long since out of the army for general worthlessness, and with flaming head-lines displayed to a sympathizing public the tale of official abuse and tyranny which had compelled these several gallant and patriotic sons of America to quit the service they were so well fitted to adorn. Dozens of tramps and tatterdemalions reaped sudden and unexpected harvest of eleemosynary quarters and lunches from gaping audiences in the beer-saloons by detailing individual experiences of their own when serving under Lieutenant this or that in the Eleventh Horse or the Thirty-Third Foot. Dozens of Munchausens wore the reporters' pencils down to the wood with details of their harrowing sufferings. Then the editorials began, and gravely lectured the people on the wrongs of the whole system,—the unrepublican character of an army anyhow, the repugnance in the American mind to all idea of discipline. Meantime, of course, the *Palladium* was firing hot shot by the ton, and new so-called scandals at Ryan, fresh outrages on the helpless and down-trodden soldiery, were the subjects of Mr. Abrams's lurid delineations, until it was to be wondered at that in their wrath the offended public did not wipe the foul blot on their civilization from the face of the earth.

It was on Friday evening that, in answer to certain despatches he had been firing at department head-quarters, Colonel Morris received a message that at least put him out of uncertainty. That day the *Palladium* had outdone itself, and no one not conversant with the illimitable faculties of the paid correspondent can begin to imagine the heroic size attained in its columns by the incident briefly sketched in the last chapter: "Continued Persecution of Trooper Welsh! Heaped-up Humiliations on his Head! Forced to Show Slavish Homage to his Insulter! Helpless Wrath of Comrades!" etc. The details of the incident as told by the special correspondent lost nothing of sensationalism; and Lieutenant Lewis came in now for his share of obloquy. Poor Welsh was represented as having been marched out and with brutal curses compelled to salute Lieutenant Hearn, despite the fact that he as member of the guard was by law and Regulations exempted from the requirement. "In vain did the young soldier plead that paragraph 391 of the Regulations fully excused him. His relentless persecutors defied the laws of Congress and compelled him to 'stand and deliver' for the purpose of adding to the indignities already heaped upon him. Could the readers of the *Palladium* have heard the low, deep mutterings of the men in the garrison this night, no mutiny on their part need have surprised them." The editor, too, backed up his correspondent in a three-quarter-column assault on the ridiculous etiquette of the army. "It may be," he said, "all well enough in the conscripted camps of Europe, where whole nations are forced to service

under arms, to exact of the rank and file this slavish exhibition to superiors; but it is an insult to the high intelligence of the soldiers of free America, that because a beardless boy happens to have a strap upon his shoulder, thousands of scarred veterans should be compelled to do him homage. The whole idea of the salute is repugnant to the republican mind, and should be abolished; and for that matter, as we have no further use for an army, why stop at the salute?"

No doubt the ninety-and-nine of the *Palladium's* readers thought their editor was sound, and were as opposed to the idea of that courtesy which is officially declared to be "indispensable among military men," as to any exhibition thereof in the streets of their own peaceful and remarkably well regulated metropolis.

But Colonel Morris was himself wofully perturbed about this time. After immolating Cross and other officers by name, as was to be expected, the *Palladium* man had taken to poking ugly little insinuations at the post commander; and this, thought Morris, was the height of ingratitude. He was in no pleasant mood when the men came marching up from stables, and it stung him to see how cordial everybody was to Hearn, who, confound it, was the cause of the whole row. The telegram he had just received settled that matter once and for all; yet he was glad he had an adjutant on whom to devolve the coming duty.

Ever since Hearn's trouble began, Captain and Mrs. Lane had lost no opportunity to make him understand that they were devotedly his friends, and that if he would but come to them in his sense of utter wrong the shelter of their home, the welcome of their fireside, would be some compensation at least for the harsh treatment accorded to him by the world at large. Thanks to the efforts of the Western newspaper, a million or more of free people had learned to look upon his name as the synonyme for all that was swaggering, brutal, drunken, and bullying; and it was easy to see that the young soldier was cut to the heart.

But an unexpected ally had been discovered. Hearn, who had at first held aloof in solitude, brooding over his troubles, began to show decided readiness to come. And though at all times grateful and most attentive to Mrs. Lane, that clear-sighted young matron speedily noted how his handsome blue eyes would wander about in search of her quietly-observant friend, and that ever since the night of her tilt with Lawler Miss Marshall's interest in the case had been quadrupled. Now, this was not exactly what Mrs. Lane had planned. She wanted Georgia to marry in the army, but she also wanted, and saw nothing in the least unreasonable in so wanting, to select that spirited young woman's husband for her. She did not for a moment think that there was any danger of Georgia's falling in love with Hearn. He was several years her senior, to be sure; he was handsome, distinguished as a soldier, a man of unimpeachable character, as modern men go; but, she argued, "he is so much younger for his years than Georgia for hers." She had had to think so much for herself, and now the man she should marry was—well, not crabbed old Major Kenyon, of course; he was a widower,—sour and yet susceptible. It was only too plain that he loved to come to the house and talk with Miss Marshall by the

hour, especially when the cavalrymen were all down at stables. Neither did she want the doctor, whom Jeannette McCrea could have if she would only make up her mind to drop Jim Wallace, who was now so devoted that the yearning medical man had no chance whatever. No; she didn't see, after all, just the right man for Georgia: still, she had always thought of some one so much older, utterly ignoring the fact that when left to themselves most women have very different views of their own. Not a word had she uttered to Georgia, of course, but to her loving and indulgent spouse she had gone so far as to say,—

"It is lovely to see how he is beginning to find comfort in her society; but, Fred——" And Madame breaks off, irresolute yet suggestive.

"But, Mabel——" responds her gray-eyed lord, with indefiniteness equal to her own.

"Just suppose——" And then another pause on her part.

"Just suppose what, Mrs. Lane?—that it should snow before September?"

"Now, Fred, you know; or else you haven't any eyes for——"

"I haven't—except for one," says Lane, parrying the situation with the very words he knows will most delight her.

"You absurd boy!" But she comes fluttering across the room to reward him as he deserves. "What I mean is, Georgia might get to think of him."

"Well, everybody is thinking of him just now, and in the light of such a catastrophe I suppose I'd have to make him think of her."

"He does now; and if he doesn't—you can't make people fall in love, can you?"

"Agreed, Mrs. Wisehead. Neither can you prevent it, can you? I know I couldn't stop a fellow from falling in love with you some few years ago, hard as I tried. The more I tried to put you away, the more you kept coming into that fellow's empty head." (Here Captain Lane is rewarded again, and as soon as able to speak resumes.) "So why worry now?"

"Well, I'm not worrying, exactly, only——"

"Only what? Every man can't have a wife like mine. Still, wouldn't she make rather a good one?"

"Good? Goodness! But the question is to find the right man. However, I know what you mean, Fred,—Don't interfere; so I won't. And there they are chatting in the parlor yet, and it's time for him to get ready for parade—— Why, here's Mr. Mason!" And Mrs. Lane, who had slipped into the dining-room, caught sight of the adjutant at the front door.

"What is it, Mason?" asked Lane, a sudden trouble in his eyes, as he hurried through the hall.

"The colonel wishes Mr. Wharton to assume command of C troop temporarily. I'm ordered to place Hearn in arrest," was the answer, in tones that trembled a little despite Mason's efforts at impassibility.

Lane's hand was extended, as though to close the parlor door, which stood ajar, but he was too late. The clink of the scabbard without had

already been heard, and almost at the instant Hearn stepped forth into the hall.

"You won't have far to look, old fellow. Here I am."

"My heaven, Hearn! I thought to find you over home, or I would never have come here on such an errand."

"Never mind; I am with you. Good-by, captain; say good-afternoon to—to the ladies for me."

"By Jove! I'm going over with you," said Lane, snatching a forage-cap and springing down the steps. He did not want to encounter the questioning eyes within.

But Mabel and Georgia Marshall met at the parlor door.

"Have you heard—do you know?" was the faltering question of the former.

"Hear! Know! Who could help hearing? Is it not an outrage?"

XIII.

If Frank Hearn were a wronged and unhappy man before the regiment marched away, his troubles seemed only intensified now. Deprived of the command of his troop and confined to his quarters in close arrest, he was confronted by a new sorrow, one least expected, yet hardest of all to bear.

The sharp assaults of the *Palladium* to a certain extent had been discontinued. One great and influential journal of the Northwest had taken the pains to investigate the situation independently, and was now giving its readers the benefit of the facts in the case of the much-heralded martyr Welsh. And when that eminent patriot was thus shown up in his true colors the other papers had to moderate their ecstasies on his account. Very few managing editors, indeed, had not already been shrewd enough to see what he must inevitably turn out to be. But the originators had hoped to effect their onslaught on the army before the actual character of their witnesses was exposed. The moment the *Pioneer* came to the rescue it was time for them to change the line of attack, for no one of their number dared lock horns on a question of fact with a journal so fearless and respected. Still, as a lie can never overtake the truth, and as in this case the lie had a week's start, these exponents of the ethics of American journalism had reason to feel moderately well satisfied. It would be prudent, however, to let the matter "simmer" now; and there were other reasons, too: so Mr. Abrams was recalled from his mission to Central City, and set to work at the foundations of the character of a gentleman just spoken of in connection with the coming municipal elections. He had hitherto borne an unimpeachable name in the community, but his friends had committed the grievous offence of speaking of him for mayor before the *Palladium* had been consulted, and it therefore became the *Palladium's* duty to pull his props from under him.

Contenting himself for the time-being with the announcement that the military authorities at division and army head-quarters had expressed their deep sense of obligation to the *Palladium* for having brought to light the scandalous condition of affairs at Fort Ryan, and

that it had received their assurances that as the result of its efforts Lieutenant Hearn would be brought to trial by court-martial, this public-spirited journal wisely turned its attention elsewhere. Other papers, of course, kept up the hue and cry, but, the *Pioneer's* columns having warned them that their martyr was, after all, only a scamp, and their victim a young officer with a capital military record whom the court might, after all, acquit, it became necessary to prepare the public mind for such a *bouleversement* by pitching into military courts in general as "Star Chamber" affairs, organized only to convict privates and whitewash officers; one journal going so far as to announce that a "court-martial for Lieutenant Hearn meant simply that a body of men, each and every one of whom was in the daily habit of violating every rule of decency and humanity, was to sit in judgment on his case and declare him innocent."

All this, of course, came duly marked and with pencil comment to Mr. Hearn from scores of anonymous senders, as he sat dazed and disheartened in his cheerless room; but this was not all. Nearly two weeks had elapsed now since the first assault, and the home letters, for which he had looked with mingled fear and longing, had begun to come. The first he opened was from his mother. She had received the marked copies of the *Palladium* of the first three or four days, sent no one knew by whom, and they were quickly followed by others.

What was it Thackeray wrote?—"There are stories to a man's disadvantage that the women who are fondest of him are always the most eager to believe."

A devoted woman and mother was Mrs. Hearn, but her sole knowledge of army life was derived from what she had seen around their nearly ruined home in a Southern city about the close of the war. Frank's boyhood was spent in straitened circumstances, but little by little his father's toil and pluck had restored their fallen fortunes, and, a stanch soldier himself, he could not wonder that the young fellow's heart should be wrapped up in the hope of a commission. Poor Mrs. Hearn! she had looked for something far different, and even her pride at Frank's winning a cadetship at West Point by competitive examination did not reconcile her to his entering upon a profession which would associate him with such characters as she had seen about the time the great army was being disbanded and hundreds of officers seemed to have nothing to do but carouse. By the time he was graduated, his father's practice had become so well established as to warrant the squire-colonel's yielding to his wife's pleadings. Secretly he rather wanted the boy to go on in his career, and was prouder of the chevrons the handsome young cadet captain had worn than of the old tarnished sleeve-knots that he had put away so reverently the day after Appomattox, where Lee's kindly hand had rested for a moment on his arm when he went to bid his beloved chief adieu. Yielding to her entreaties, he offered Frank good inducements to drop the army and come home and study law, but the youngster said his heart was bound up in the cavalry. The mother had let him go with prayers and tears. The letters from Ryan were buoyant, and made no mention of care or trouble of any kind. How could he ask his father's help when he had

refused his offer? The colonel rejoiced at the youngster's independence and decision, although he said nothing to his wife. Then came Frank's orders for Arizona, and Mrs. Hearn sobbed herself to sleep. Again the father said, "Resign if you like, and I'll start you here," but in the solitude of his library he kissed the boy's letter and blessed him in his heart of hearts for replying, "I wouldn't be my father's son were I to resign now, with the prospect of sharp fighting ahead." Heaven! with what trembling hands and tear-dimmed eyes he read the glowing words of old Captain Rawlins's despatch telling how brilliant and daring the boy had been in the first fierce battle with the Apaches! He draped the stars and stripes over Frank's picture in the parlor, and bade the neighbors in to drink to the New South and the old flag, and even Mrs. Hearn, ever pessimistic and filled with secret dread of vague temptations that she knew not of, fearing them more than peril or ambuscade, took heart and strove to rejoice that Frank was such a soldier. How shocked and sorrow-stricken they were when but a short time after came the tidings of the old captain's lamented death! How they studied all Frank's letters, and learned to know the regimental officers through his eyes, and longed to meet that capital adjutant, Lane, when he came to Cincinnati recruiting! Colonel Hearn even took a few days off and the north-bound "flyer" on the Queen & Crescent to go thither and make the acquaintance of his boy's friend, and sat for hours with Lane at the club, listening to his praise of Frank. Then came the eastward move again, and a brief leave, and the mother's heart yearned over her stalwart son, wondering at the bronze and tan of his once fair skin and rejoicing in the strength of his handsome face. Mother-like, she sought long talks with him and strove to catechise him as to what they did when not actually in the field. Was there not a great deal of dissipation? Did they not play cards? Were there not too many temptations to drink wine? What opportunity had they for attending divine service? etc. So far as he himself was concerned, he answered frankly, but as to his comrades, all these questions he had laughingly parried. He had now been six years an officer, and had never once asked his father for money, yet she nursed her theory that under it all there was something hidden. From childhood she had been taught that army life meant frivolity and dissipation, if not vice; and now at last, when her husband was miles away from home, looking after investments he had made in Florida, came this startling and terrible confirmation of her fears. In glaring head-lines, in crushing, damning terms, in half a score of prominent Northern papers she read of her son as a drunken bully, a gambler, an abusive tyrant to the helpless men committed to his charge, and, utterly overwhelmed, the poor soul had thrown herself upon her knees to implore of Heaven the strength to bear the dreaded blow, and wisdom to guide her aright in the effort to reclaim her wayward boy. The gray-haired pastor, for whom she had sent, came and mingled his tears and prayers with hers, and then they had between them written the letter that was now before him:

"It is but the confirmation of a long-haunting fear. I have all along felt that you were holding back something from me, my son; and God

only knows how I have prayed that this cup might be spared me and this sin averted from you. I dreaded the temptation of army life for one of your impulsive temperament. I strove, I rebelled, against the idea of your being subjected to such companionship. I hoped against hope that it might not be as I feared; but, alas! my intuition was right, after all. Do not think I am angry, my boy. Do not let this drive you from us. As soon as it is over, come home, and all that a mother's love can do shall be done to spare you further bitterness. My first impulse was to wire your uncle James at Washington to ask if something could not be done to avert the court-martial; but good old Dr. Wayne, whose son was in the army before the war, tells me that it is hopeless, and that the best that can be done is to get your resignation accepted, so that, though you have to quit the service, as he says, it may not be by the disgrace of a sentence. I have, therefore, wired James to go at once to the Secretary, and Dr. Wayne has also invoked the aid of some influential friends. Wire me instantly on receipt of this, that I may know that you are bearing up manfully. It will soon be over. May God sustain you, my son, is the prayer of your devoted and distracted

"MOTHER.

"P.S.—Frank, my worst anxiety is on your poor father's account. I dread to think of the effect this news will have upon him. He never appreciated the danger as I did."

And this was the letter poor Hearn was almost raging over when the door opened, after a single prefatory bang, and in came the major:

"Hello, lad! how are you to-day? The regulations which forbid your visiting the commanding officer don't prevent his coming in to see you, I suppose. Any more newspaper attacks? You couldn't have got much worse if you had been running for President of these United States. I see that three papers of my beloved home are now calling me ugly names because my brother published a letter in which I had the temerity to say to him that Welsh was a sneak and Abrams a slouch and you a soldier; but I never expect anything better. Why, Hearn, my boy, forgive me. Something's wrong, and here I'm rattling away and never seeing it."

"Read that," said Hearn; and the major read, with wonderment and concern deepening in his grizzled face, then turned away to the window with a long whistle.

"Well, lad, that is something even I hadn't thought of. By gad, I'm going to write a few lines to your good mother on my own hook: she reminds me of mine. No; no shutting yourself up in your bedroom now. Come out here on the piazza, where there's sunshine, and where there will be roses presently. Mrs. Lane and Miss Marshall have gone over to the hospital with some jellies for Brent, and it's time for them to return. Come out, I say, or, as commanding officer of the post, I'll send a file of the guard to haul you out. You've lost three shades of tan in four days, and I'm not going to let you mope in here, if I have to annul your colonel's order of close arrest and give you extended limits. Come out."

There was no resisting the major; there was no resisting the deeper

longing in his heart. Every day since his incarceration Mrs. Lane had found means to send him some friendly little note, together with dainties of domestic manufacture; every day she and Miss Marshall had appeared at least once or twice upon the walk in front, although he could not join them; and now they were interesting themselves in Corporal Brent, said the major, and the corporal was getting well enough to be read to a little while and to see some of his chums for a few minutes and to inquire how he had been hurt. Kenyon fairly towed his prisoner out through the hall and landed him on the veranda just as the noonday drum was sounding orderly call, then rattling out "Roast Beef of Old England" in hoarse accompaniment to the piping of the fife.

Half an hour later, two parasols could be distinguished above the low shrubbery farther east along the row, and the ladies on Burnham's veranda, where the doctor was seated in clover, now that Wallace had ridden away, stepped forward to the hedge and accosted the bearers and strove to persuade them to stay. Hearn's heart seemed to halt in protest, then pounded gladly away again, for the delay was but momentary, —phenomenally short for feminine chats; but the mail was coming, and Mrs. Lane was impatient to get her letters. Once more the parasols came floating along above the hedge. One, held some six inches higher than the other, was on the outside, farthest from the fence. That was *hers*, and she it must be who would first come in sight from behind the big lilac-bush in Brodie's yard. If Mrs. Brodie should happen to see them and stop them! But no; Mrs. Brodie went across the parade to the Crosses' half an hour ago, thank heaven. Hearn's eager eyes were fixed upon the outer edge of that lovely lilac screen, longing for the first glance of the face he had seen in his dreams night and day now for nearly a week. If she were thinking of him, if he were anything to her, would not she be apt to look toward this veranda the instant she hove in sight around that sheltering bush? "Yonder they come now," said Kenyon, slowly lowering his boot-heels from the balcony rail. "I'm going to stop them at the gate to see how Brent is."

Another instant, and once more the floating fringes of the outer parasol came sailing slowly into sight beyond the lilacs, then the white ferrule, a daintily-gloved hand, a white-draped shoulder, then a proudly-poised, dark-haired head, thick, low-arched eyebrows and long curling lashes through a flimsy web of veil that hung almost to the rosy lips, close compressed; then sudden upward sweep of lash, a quick, straight glance from two deep, dark eyes, a gleam of joy, of glad recognition, an instant parting of the curving lips and a flash of white, even teeth, and Hearn's heart throbbed and bounded. She had seen him instantly, and was glad.

Yet it was Mrs. Lane who had to do most of the talking, for Georgia Marshall was strangely silent. Every now and then her eyes seemed to take quick note of the pallor of his face and the lines of care and trouble. Kenyon had held open the gate and quietly steered the two ladies to the veranda, where Hearn was hastily placing chairs; and though the mail-orderly was approaching and Mrs. Lane knew there must be letters from her captain, she could not take Georgia instantly away, and so for a few moments they sat there, in their dainty summer

gowns and with deep sympathy in their eyes,—eyes so different in color, yet so like in expression, they would have cheered a sorer heart than Hearn's.

The orderly carrying the mail came briskly in at the gate.

"I left Mrs. Lane's letters at the house, ma'am," he said, as he handed a package to Kenyon and proceeded to unload half a dozen bulky newspapers on Hearn. Kenyon had opened his official letter with brief "excuse me," and then began to chuckle:

"Hearn, my boy, they mean to do you all proper honor. Just look at this detail, will you? Four or five colonels and majors and half a dozen captains to sit in judgment, and——well, if this don't beat all! old Lawler himself for judge-advocate."

Hearn's face was flushing and paling by turns.

"You don't mean that Colonel Lawler himself is detailed?"

"Certainly I do; and what do you want to bet the *Palladium* doesn't say that this was done in deference to its suggestion that no biassed associates of the accused officer should be allowed to officiate, as the people will tolerate no whitewashing of character in this most flagrant case, or words to that effect? Oh, I know those fellows! There's more conceit in one newspaper office in my beloved home than in all the armies in Christendom."

The ladies had risen, Mrs. Lane's eyes saying plainly to her friend, "We ought to go."

"Does the court meet here?" asked Hearn, quietly. "Please don't go, Mrs. Lane,—not just yet."

"Indeed we must, Mr. Hearn. I know you need to confer with the major now, and we will only be in the way."

Hearn's eyes had sought Miss Marshall's. She was standing by the balcony with half-averted face, yet listening intently.

"The court meets here, and on Monday of next week. Verily, Hearn, public wrath demands a prompt trial of your villany. Now, with Lawler to prosecute, you'll need a friend to defend. Who is it to be?"

"I have not asked any one," said Hearn, slowly. "The charges have not yet reached me. I do not know of what I am to be accused, who are the witnesses, or anything about it. Whom could I ask to oppose Lawler?"

Miss Marshall had slowly turned, and now looked full at Kenyon's troubled face. Her slender hands were clasping; her breath seemed to come and go almost too quickly.

"There's no man here fit to advise you, Hearn, and I know of no one quite a match in subterfuge for that 'Tombs Lawler,'" was the reluctant answer.

"Then I'll fight it out alone as best I can," said Hearn, at last.

The ladies were going; Mrs. Lane was down the steps already, and the major gallantly striving to raise her parasol. Hearn had clasped Miss Marshall's slender hand as she turned to say adieu, and the frank cordial pressure emboldened him. He would have held it firmly, but as firmly, yet gently, it was withdrawn.

"Only a week yet, Mr. Hearn," she spoke, her bosom rising and

falling quickly. "Is there no officer you know to take up this case for you?"

"I fear not, Miss Marshall. You know I'm not even a first lieutenant yet; and he is a lieutenant-colonel."

She looked up one instant in his eyes, then with sudden impulsive movement held forth the hand she had just withdrawn.

"Good-by," she said, turned quickly, and was gone.

For a moment the two friends walked on in silence.

"A penny for your thoughts, Georgia."

"I wish I were a man."

"On his account, is it? Don't you know—he would far, far rather have you just as you are?"

XIV.

A general court-martial was in session at Ryan, and for three days had been sitting in judgment on Lieutenant Hearn. It was the first occasion in many a long year on which Colonel Lawler had appeared in the *rôle* of judge-advocate, that complex and contradictory position wherein the so-called legal adviser of the court, having prosecuted in the name of the government to the extent of his ability, proceeds to demolish his own elaborately-planned attack. It is the not infrequent result of such a system that the exertions of the prosecution so exhaust its representatives that the defence is left to its own devices, and in the case of Colonel Lawler, as has been said, he had always held that when an officer was under trial the moral obligation of the government was to find him guilty, if a possible thing.

No one on the court could quite understand why Lawler had been detailed for this duty. It was a most unusual thing to call upon the officers of the department of military justice itself to furnish the prosecutor; rather was it their province to remain at the office of the division or department commander, and, in reviewing the records, to sit in judgment on the judges. But the *Palladium*, true to Kenyon's prophecy, was not slow in explaining the situation. It was a case in which the whole people, with itself as their representative, had demanded the trial of the officer who dared maltreat the man. No ordinary occasion was this, but one to attract wide attention throughout the entire nation and be daily reported by the press. Colonel Lawler saw opportunity for distinction hitherto unequalled; he *asked* of his general the detail as judge-advocate of the court, and the general, though surprised, saw no way to refuse.

So carefully had the court been chosen that of its entire array of thirteen members every man was personally a stranger to the young soldier whose fate lay in their hands. Of all his regiment not another officer was at the post when the court began to arrive, and the only soldier—heaven save the mark!—was Welsh, now assigned, much to their disgust, to Captain Brodie's company of the infantry for rations and quarters until his evidence should be given; and Welsh was the constant centre of a group of newspaper men now billeted at Central City and resenting it not a little that they were not invited to put up at the fort.

But, as matters stood, the fort was already taxed to its utmost capacity: the only quarters in which there was room for the arriving gentlemen were those of the absent cavalry officers. Mrs. Morris had two spare rooms, and promptly invited Colonels Grace and Maitland, old friends of her husband, to be her guests. Kenyon took in three of the seniors. Mrs. Wharton happened to know Captain Chase, who was one of the detail, and scandalized Mrs. Brodie by borrowing the Lane barouche, meeting him at the depot, and driving him straight to her roof.

"Mind you," said that young matron, "*every* man on this court shan't go to its first session without knowing something of Frank Hearn's real character. I only wish I had room for more."

Mrs. Lane had no spare bedroom, but bade her regimental friends who had, to fill them up with members of the court. "Georgia and I will board the whole array, if you will only let us," she declared. "I'll set a lunch for the court at noon, and dine the entire party at seven every day they are here, if some one will only agree to take Colonel Lawler."

Nobody wanted Lawler, and so he was one of the three relegated to the gloomy precincts of old Kenyon's quarters and compelled to rough it at bachelor mess. It was arranged that eight members of the court should be quartered among the cavalry homesteads and otherwise be entertained at the Lanes'. Of such are the expedients to which garrisons are subject.

It was not until Monday afternoon that the court began its session. Two officers had telegraphed that they could not reach the post until the arrival of the noon train; but all that morning and most of Sunday the judge-advocate had been bustling about the garrison, full of importance and enthusiasm. Recognizing the interest felt in the case by an entire neighborhood, and sedulously active in providing for the needs of the press, Lawler had caused the quarters of C troop to be cleared of all the iron bunks. Arm-racks and lockers were shifted away; a long table had been brought up from the mess-room underneath and set in the middle of the big room, the president's chair at the head, his own at the foot, those of the members at the sides. Another long table was provided for the swarm of newspaper correspondents, and then, for the general public, the mess-rooms of the cavalry had been ransacked, and benches and chairs to accommodate several hundred people ranged about the room. It was Saturday night when Lawler arrived and was met by Major Kenyon and escorted to his quarters.

"You might tell Mr. Hearn that whatever he may desire to say to me about the case I can hear to-night. You have no objection to his coming to your quarters, I suppose?"

"Lord, no! I like it. So does he, generally; but if you want to see Hearn you'll have to go yourself."

"Why?" said Lawler, reddening. "He ought to know that it is to his interest to seek the advice and assistance of the judge-advocate. Of course he knows that I must do my full duty in prosecuting the case; but, outside of that, any service I can render him he has a right to call for."

"Oh, he understands; but, as he was given no opportunity to speak for himself when you were investigating the case, I fancy he will ask none now, until he comes before the court. Then you probably will hear from him."

"It might be very much better if he were to frankly consult the judge-advocate," said Lawler, gazing keenly at Kenyon from under his shaggy brows.

"Very much better for the prosecution. But—how better for him?"

"Well, those young men never gain anything by fighting a case. He had much better throw himself on the clemency of the court. But I suppose some one has undertaken to defend him?" Another shrewd glance.

"*Some* one! yes, I've heard that several some-ones offered their services by first mail the moment it was known you were to be prosecutor. What the devil did you take it for, anyway?"

"You seem to forget, Major Kenyon, that it was a matter of very grave importance to the army as well as to the public," said the colonel, with much dignity. "Officers who are rash enough to seek to defend him can have little conception of the feeling aroused throughout the entire North."

"True," said Kenyon, with sarcastic emphasis. "It's one of the singular traits of some fellows in the army that, instead of meekly knuckling under to what they know to be an outrageous misrepresentation of themselves and their profession, they should have the consummate effrontery to resent even newspaper attacks. Now, you can hardly conceive it possible, Colonel Lawler, but, do you know, there are actually officers who think Hearn a thousand times more sinned against than sinning? And, that being their conviction, they are so blind to their own interest as to be willing to fight for it. It is incomprehensible—to some people; but it's a fact."

And—will it be believed?—when Colonel Lawler sent his orderly to say that he would receive Hearn at Major Kenyon's quarters in case he desired to see him, the orderly came back with the lieutenant's compliments and the singular response that the lieutenant knew of no reason whatever why he should want to see the colonel at any time.

Lawler had conceived it his duty then to accost Mr. Hearn on the piazza of his quarters, and blandly to inform him that he was entitled, if he saw fit, to call in the services of some suitable friend as *amicus curiæ*. Brodie and Cross were both sitting there at the moment, and glanced at each other with a grin, as Hearn coolly looked the judge-advocate straight in the eye and remarked that he was aware of the fact.

"I thought you might not know it, and I desired to say that I should interpose no objection," said Lawler.

"I am not aware, Colonel Lawler, that it is the judge-advocate who either denies or consents. It is the court, as I understand it, that settles the question." And Lawler went away with tingling ears. Hearn's temper was being sorely tried. No less than four times that Sunday morning had he been called upon by gentlemen representing

themselves as correspondents for some paper or other, each one of whom desired to interview him as to the line of defence he proposed adopting, and really seemed astonished that he should decline to give any information on the subject. And Hearn's replies to Lawler had been buzzed around the garrison with added emphasis at every repetition.

And yet, when Monday afternoon came, and, in the presence of a crowded array of civilians from all over the neighborhood, Colonel Lawler impressively inquired the name of the gentleman whom the accused desired to introduce as counsel, and even the fans ceased to flutter, and all ears were intent upon the reply, and a dozen pencils were poised over the pads on the reporters' table, Mr. Hearn astonished almost all hearers by placidly, even smilingly, responding,—

"Nobody."

"Why, I understood from gentlemen here at the post that you intended to introduce counsel," said Lawler, much nettled.

"With all deference to the court," said Hearn, "the understanding of the judge-advocate is at fault."

There was instant titter, and a ripple of applause. The correspondents glanced quickly at one another and then in surprise at Hearn. For a man who refused to talk at their bidding, he was displaying unlooked-for ability now. Lawler reddened to the roots of his hair and glanced angrily around.

"The audience must keep order," he said. "You are at liberty to witness these proceedings, but audible comment or any levity at attempted witticisms on the part of the accused will not be tolerated."

But Hearn's face wore a provokingly placid smile. And the president, rapping on the table with the hilt of his sword, called for silence and curtly demanded of the judge-advocate that he proceed with the case.

Not ten feet from where Mr. Hearn sat by his little table, whereon were his memoranda and a few books, Georgia Marshall, with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, bent and whispered to Mrs. Lane,—

"One for our side."

And Mrs. Wharton, catching the eye of some friends across the room, very improperly tapped the back of her kid-covered thumb-nails together in mute applause. The press and the populace might be with the prosecution, but it was easy to see that there were loyal and lavish hearts there stanch for the defence.

The court had not been authorized to sit without regard to hours. Lawler argued that in a case of such wide-spread interest the sessions should be held when it would be most convenient for the world at large to attend, and by adjourning at three P.M., the conventional hour, all good citizens would be able to get home in abundance of time, secure in the belief that nothing would transpire before they could return to their post of observation on the morrow. Nothing of great consequence was accomplished on the first day, beyond the ceremony of swearing the court, which Lawler rendered as impressive as possible, the administering of the judge-advocate's oath, which Colonel Grace rattled through in a perfunctory style that robbed the legal gentleman of the dramatic effect he had contemplated, and the reading of the charges and specifi-

cations, which were breathlessly listened to by the throng and most oratorically delivered by the judge-advocate. There was something especially fine in the air with which he turned and faced the soldierly young officer who, in his trim fatigue uniform, stood opposite to him at the table.

"To the first specification of the first charge, how say you, sir?—guilty or not guilty?"

And, in the simplest way in the world, the answer came in tones sufficiently clear to be audible beyond the open window:

"Not guilty."

And so to each and every specification and to the charges of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman and of conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline, Lieutenant Hearn calmly protested his entire innocence, and the pleas were duly recorded.

Then Colonel Lawler announced that in view of the importance and probable length of the case he desired the services of a stenographer and requested the authority of the court to call one in. The president looked perturbed; stenographers were expensive, and the last court he was on had been rapped over the knuckles for employing one, although the record exceeded a hundred and fifty pages in length.

"How long will you need one, and how soon can you get him here?" asked Colonel Grace.

"Well, we can get through with the case in very short time with a stenographer, but it will take a week at least without one." He did not say, however, that he had one already in the room, in the shape of a newspaper man from Chicago. Some of the court began to consult among themselves.

"Make him write his own proceedings," whispered Colonel Maitland to the president. "By gad, he was probably the man that rapped your court for employing one there at Omaha last month." Then he scribbled a line and tossed the scrap of paper over to Major Putnam on the other side, and passed word down to Captain Thorp, who had been judge-advocate of the court in question. It was evident that the members thought that here was an admirable chance to "work" the judge-advocate, a thing seldom enjoyed; and at last old Grace, humming and hawing a little, said that the court could not see the necessity, in view of the remarks made by division head-quarters on a recent case, and must for the present decline the request. Whereat Colonel Lawler, in manifest ill humor, remarked that he could be safely expected to say what would and what would not be approved by the division commander, and that, if the court would not order it, he would get the order by telegraph.

"All right," said the president; "and meantime we'll proceed without one. I suppose you are ready with your first witness, Mr. Judge-Advocate?"

"If the court insists, yes; but I prefer to wait until I hear from the telegram which I am now writing."

"We had better go right ahead," said Colonel Grace.

And so, amidst profound silence, the name of the first witness

was called; and with the eyes of the entire room upon him, neatly dressed, cleanly shaved, and looking his very best, Trooper Welsh was ushered in from the outer gallery, was sworn impressively by Lawler, and was asked for his name, rank, and regiment, and whether he knew the accused. The new correspondent of the *Palladium* described the hasty glance which Welsh cast at the lieutenant as one in which "his glowing, dark eyes kindled with the pent-up sense of the wrongs and humiliations heaped upon him by the officer in question." Major Kenyon, sitting close by Mrs. Lane, looked at Brodie with swift whispered comment on that furtive glance. Miss Marshall never took her eyes from the witness's face.

"State how long you have been in service, and with what company you have served."

"I've been——" then there was a sudden flutter of the eyelids and a moment's hesitation, but only a moment's,—"I've been in Troop C, Eleventh Cavalry, about eight months, stationed here at Fort Ryan. I enlisted in St. Louis a year ago."

The judge-advocate was just writing out the answer, when Miss Marshall leaned over and whispered a word to Kenyon. The major nodded appreciatively and looked eagerly along the faces of the members of the court across the table. Captain Thorp's eyes met his, and it was Thorp who suddenly spoke:

"The witness has not answered the question, as I understand it."

"He has answered as the court understands it," said Lawler, sharply, "and entirely to my satisfaction."

"He may have answered to the satisfaction of the judge-advocate, but I suggest that the court can speak for itself," was Thorp's cool reply. "The question should have elicited an answer as to the entire service, possibly in other commands, on the part of the witness; and he replies only as to C troop."

"He has given the exact information I desired," said Lawler, hastily, "and all my question was intended to cover. I protest against interference with my witnesses."

Bang! came old Grace's sword-hilt on the table.

"It is three o'clock, Mr. Judge-Advocate, and the court will adjourn."

Lawler drew a long breath, and glanced triumphantly at Thorp.

But, however little the first day brought forth, the second in no wise lacked sensation. Welsh and Mr. Levi Schönberg, in terms most emphatic, had described the assault upon the principal witness; both declared that with brutal violence Welsh had been dragged forth from the bar-room and then kicked and cuffed all the way to the guard-house; both denied the faintest provocation or excuse; and then, amid oppressive stillness, Mr. Schönberg had described his connection with the trader's establishment six years before, and his knowledge of the pecuniary dealings of the accused. In positive terms he asserted that old Mr. Braine had lent the accused sums aggregating six hundred dollars at different times, and that he had frequently and vainly importuned him, in letters written by Schönberg, for payment, had been ignored, and that finally, when he, after the accused returned to the

post, strove to collect the amount, he, the witness, was met with curt refusal, denials of all indebtedness, and finally with threats and assault. Nothing much more connected could well be imagined. Both men were positive and precise as to facts and dates, and both when cross-examined by the accused stuck stoutly and positively to their versions. Another witness was Mrs. Schönberg that was and Mrs. Braine that had been, and her testimony, though by no means truculent or positive, was largely in support of that of her Jewish spouse. She was sure of the loans to Hearn; sure he had never repaid them; sure that Braine had directed them placed upon the books, and had frequently spoken to her of them, because she thought that he was too open-handed and credulous, and had told him so.

When court adjourned at three P.M. on the second day the case had gone dead against Hearn, and Colonel Grace gravely inquired if he could not procure counsel even now; it might still be allowed. But Hearn quietly shook his head. Wednesday morning was to have brought the redoubtable Mr. Abrams to the scene to aid the case for the prosecution, but Colonel Lawler was compelled to say that the witness was not forthcoming, and had not even answered telegrams sent him. There was some quiet grinning at the reporters' table, and old Kenyon breathed a sigh as he bent over and whispered to Brodie,—

"D—n that fellow! He never meant to come, and Lawler knows it. Cross-examination would have broken him all up."

But two other civilians were produced, who claimed to be old friends of the late trader, and one of these testified that the week before his death Mr. Braine had declared that Hearn had refused to repay the money and he regarded it as good as lost. Hearn protested against this as "hearsay" and not testimony under oath. Lawler vowed it was material and confirmatory, and the court was cleared, to the utter indignation of the correspondents thus compelled to quit the room with the common herd. Thrice again this happened during the day, and people grew disgusted, many of them leaving; but those who remained, including the officers, could see no earthly hope for Hearn. Everything had been as conclusively proved as such witnesses could establish matters, and the only chance lay in the impeachment of their testimony.

It was nearly three o'clock on Wednesday when Lawler said that if the other witness, Mr. Abrams, did not put in an appearance he would rest the case for the prosecution. Colonel Maitland inquired why the books of the late post trader had not been produced in court in support of Schönberg's testimony, and Lawler promptly responded that they were too bulky to be appended to the record, were property of the estate, and he had not considered them necessary. However, if the court insisted—— And the court did. Schönberg was directed to bring his books at ten o'clock the next day.

That evening the party gathered on Lane's piazza was very silent and sad. Kenyon had been there awhile, and gone away with bowed head and thoughtful eyes. The defence, of course, had not begun. There would be no difficulty in utterly defeating the charge of assault upon the soldier Welsh; but what worried one and all was the testi-

mony of Schönberg and Braine's relict. If that held good with the court, then Hearn had been guilty of disgraceful conduct in stating orally and in writing that he had long since paid those debts. There could be no sentence but dismissal. Hearn had shut himself up in his room. That day had brought a long letter from his father, and it was this he was studying, sore at heart, when Kenyon entered.

"You haven't slept a wink for two nights, lad, and I know it," said the major, anxiously, as he studied the worn face of his friend. "I'm going to call Ingersoll in to prescribe for you." And, despite Hearn's protest, the orderly was sent for the post surgeon.

Meantime, with many emphatic nods and "humphs," Kenyon read the long, long letter which, without a word, Hearn had placed in his hand, finishing it at last, going over several pages, and finally sighing deeply as he refolded it:

"It is just what I feared, my boy; it is just what I feared. Still, I'm glad he didn't look upon it as your mother thought he would. Wonder what she thought of my letter—— Hello, here's Ingersoll now."

"I was at the hospital with Brent," said the medical man, in some haste, "and had to go to Lane's first."

"No one ill at Lane's, I hope?" spoke Kenyon, as Hearn's face was suddenly uplifted. "I've just come from there."

"Oh, no, no; but Miss Marshall and Mrs. Lane have been going to see Brent every afternoon, and this evening he asked me to take a message over there. He wanted to see them to-night, but I had to say no; he's too feverish. They were much concerned to hear I had been called in to see you, Hearn, and I promised to come back at once and let them know how you were."

A brief examination showed the skilled practitioner the extent of Hearn's malady, and he insisted on his coming out. He would have added, "over to Lane's piazza," but members of the court were calling there, and it would hardly be the proper thing. Returning thither, however, he found the gentlemen gone and Colonel Lawler just seating himself for a social call.

"Nothing serious," he murmured to the ladies, as he took a chair, and in low tone began chatting with the Whartons. It was Lawler's voice that broke the stillness; and Lawler, full of his profession, could talk nothing but "shop."

"I could not but observe your presence in the court-room, ladies, even among the host of curious spectators. And how does a military court impress you, Miss Marshall, now that you have seen it?"

"I can tell you better when I have seen it all, colonel. Thus far we've had nothing but the prosecution. It will seem less one-sided after the defence."

"Ah, that, I fear, will hardly amount to anything. The young man has been very ill advised,—very. Possibly you heard that I had offered him my services,—that is, any in my power to render,—and that he had refused?"

Miss Marshall simply looked at the colonel a moment, making no reply. Finally,—

"May I ask what services you could render him? I thought the prosecution was your specialty."

"Oh, it is, certainly; that is my bounden duty. Still, if I knew what evidence he had to offer,—what witnesses he meant to call,—any experienced lawyer could tell him how best to conduct the case."

Miss Marshall fairly laughed:

"That strikes me as one of the most unique ideas I ever heard, colonel. If you belonged, we will say, to the combatant force of the army, and had a position to defend, would you detail your plan of defence to the adversary?"

"My dear young lady, you totally misapprehend the peculiar mechanism of our system. After having finished the government's side, then I am free to assist the accused."

"And the accused, as I understand it, is free to 'play it alone,' as we do in euchre. Now, do you know, I think I would prefer that course to having an advocate who was more than half an opposer?"

"Well, certainly, Miss Marshall, you cannot congratulate the accused on his conduct of the case thus far. He would have stood better with the court at this minute if he had taken my advice, as he wouldn't. Then I had only one course to pursue."

"Doesn't that look just a wee bit as though he were being prosecuted for declining eminent legal assistance rather than for alleged misconduct?"

Lawler flushed, and again glanced sharply from under his sandy brows and out of the corners of his twinkling eyes.

"You have a sharp tongue, young lady," he said, "but I presume your wit is made to match it. It is a pity they could not be brought into requisition in defence of your friend before the court itself. You cannot influence me." And he laughed loudly, and glanced around as though in triumph.

"'Faith, Lawler, it's just as lucky for you that Miss Marshall isn't counsel for the accused. You'll get knocked endwise when it comes to the defence, anyhow," said the doctor.

"You think so, do you? Well, well, we'll see; we'll see."

The gate had opened, and an orderly entered.

"A telegram for the commanding officer," he said.

Kenyon took the brown envelope, tore it open, and stepped to the hall door-way, where the light would fall upon the page. A gleam of sudden satisfaction shot across his face, and he turned eagerly toward Miss Marshall, whose dark eyes had followed him. "Come," he signalled; and she rose and went to him.

"Read this," he said, in low tones, as he thrust the paper into her hand and sauntered back to his chair. "I can trust you to keep a secret."

Lawler gazed after her with unmistakable curiosity, studying her face as she read, then turned and looked at Kenyon, who was ostentatiously humming the air Miss Wharton had just begun playing on the piano. What did it mean? Was his entertainer in league with this girl who so dared him? Mrs. Lane strove to cover her friend's somewhat abrupt quitting of the group by a timely word or two, but

her question failed to catch the lawyer's ears. In a minute Georgia was back, had dropped the despatch over Kenyon's burly shoulder with the brief whispered word, "Splendid," and then almost laughingly turned on the judge-advocate.

"And now tell me, colonel, isn't there such a thing as impeaching the credibility of witnesses?"

"Oh, I suppose so in certain cases; but what has that to do with mine?"

"Yours? Well, one would hardly think your witnesses assailable, of course; but even truthful men, you know, are sometimes mistaken."

"Books and figures don't lie, Miss Marshall. You forget the books."

"Oh, true! I forgot the books. And Mr. Schönberg was book-keeper, too."

XV.

Ten o'clock had come; so had the court; so had the public, in numbers largely increased. In Central City it was generally understood that on this day the proceedings would be brought to a close. The case for the government would be concluded by the evidence of Mr. Abrams,—when he arrived,—and by the exhibition of the books of the late concern of Braine & Co. The defence really had not a leg to stand on. Everybody in the enterprising community had been assured of this fact by the repeated assertions of Mr. Schönberg and the oracular announcements of the press; and it was the popular belief that all the unfortunate officer could do would be to assail the integrity of the witnesses, which attempt would be utterly overthrown by the vigilant prosecutor, who would then conclude by a scathing review of the evidence, after which the court would promptly adjudge him guilty and sentence him to be stripped of his uniform and drummed out forthwith. Probably half the populace that thronged the court-room that bright June morning fully expected before returning to their homes to see an army lieutenant degraded of his rank and thrust forth from the reservation at the points of the bayonets of the garrison. Dozens there were who knew better; but a community reared on the pap of sensationalism as supplied by the modern press could not accept the mild and moderate views of the minority as a possibility.

"Ten-fifteen," said old Grace, thrusting his watch back into the breast of his hot uniform coat, and looking about in some impatience. "What keeps Lawler?"

"Waiting for that Jew with his books. I believe he's somewhere in that crowd on the piazza. They say his newspaper man hasn't turned up yet; but I wish you would call the court to order and give him a rap for delaying matters."

"Ah! another 'bus-load from town," said the president, as there entered at the moment a party of ladies, escorted by the sandy-haired judge-advocate himself. All around the room the benches were occupied, but behind this party came three or four soldiers carrying chairs, and, much to the disgust of Mrs. Brodie and Mrs. Graves, who had obtained, with a party of their friends, the front row nearest the table

of the accused, these chairs were planted before them, and their view was cut off by the households of some of the prominent business-men of Central City. So closely did they surround Mr. Hearn that he drew his seat a trifle nearer to that of the judge-advocate.

There was a little more space on the other side of the table, where the correspondents were, but they seemed to prefer not to crowd these gentlemen, and nobody, of course, would think of intruding between them and the court. It was almost half-after ten when a soldier made his way through the throng, and, saluting Lawler, said something in a low tone, at which the judge-advocate went over and whispered to Grace. A moment later the burly form of Major Kenyon was seen shouldering a way through the court-room, while Dr. Ingersoll's spectacled face appeared just behind him. Escorted by these gentlemen came Mrs. Lane, fresh, smiling, nodding cheerily to acquaintances in the court and around the room, looking cool and radiant in a spring costume which attracted the instant attention of the ladies and diverted their eyes from Miss Marshall, whose simple but inexpensive toilet was hardly worthy their glance, while to the grosser masculine understanding it was every whit as lovely as that of her friend and hostess. Behind them all came Sam, with four folding chairs, and, there being no other place available, the major promptly plumped them down in front of Lawler's friends and motioned his party to seats. Georgia Marshall's color deepened, as any one who looked might see, for the chair to which she was assigned was so close to that of Hearn that by simply putting forth her hand she could have touched his sleeve.

His back was to the door, and he had not seen them enter, yet at the perceptible hush that fell upon the chatter of the feminine spectators he knew who must be coming, and his pale face brightened with a sudden smile as, turning, he saw her almost at his elbow. Mrs. Lane nodded thrice, looking brightly and affectionately in his eyes, before she took her seat, just as though her efforts were to show all the throng that the women of the army held him guiltless. But Georgia Marshall's eyes were hidden for a moment behind their drooping lids. It was not until after she was seated, and a glance around had told her that the gaze of all women was still on the lovely toilet that Mabel wore, that she stole a sudden look at him and met the brave light in his wan face.

"Good-morning," he whispered. "I had not looked for anything half as good as this,—to have you here so near me."

"It was my fault we were late; they were waiting for me. I—I had been to the hospital with Dr. Ingersoll—— There's so much to tell you."

"Has any further news come?"

"Not that. Something else,—something better. Don't you see how excited the major is?"

And indeed old Kenyon seemed fairly aglow. His eyes were snapping; his face was twitching and redder than ever. He was standing at that moment, searching all the windows with keen glance and looking along the faces of the soldiers who had gathered on all sides of the piazza without. Suddenly he seemed to see the features for which he

was so eagerly looking, and with a quick gesture he called an orderly to his side and hastily scribbled these words on a piece of paper: "That third window on the west. Get around there, and don't let him out of your sight this day."

"Give that to the provost-sergeant," he said. And the orderly disappeared.

Then came the voice of Colonel Grace impatiently demanding of the judge-advocate that he proceed, and Lawler, who had been fidgeting uneasily, arose:

"May it please the court, the witness Abrams has still failed to respond; but the evidence of the other witnesses has been so conclusive that I feel that I need not detain the court. All that now remains is to examine the books of the late post trader, which, as you have demanded, are here in my possession."

"The court will come to order," said Grace, loudly.

A hush fell on the assembled throng, and all eyes were on the judge-advocate, who was busily unwrapping the package which he produced from the folds of the linen duster he had, with apparent carelessness, thrown upon his chair. Two ordinary-looking, leather-bound volumes presently appeared, which he proceeded to lay before Colonel Grace:

"I now have the honor to submit for the examination of the court such books of the former post trader as bear upon this case. In them will appear the entries of the various amounts advanced by him to the accused, with their dates, etc., and, just as stated by the witness Schönberg, it will be seen that no payments, beyond a few trifling sums, have been recorded. The amount of the indebtedness as claimed in the specifications will be found to agree with the figures."

As he spoke, Lawler had opened the volumes at points indicated by slips of paper and spread them upon the table. Grace adjusted his eye-glasses and conned over one of the books, while Maitland took the second. The other members of the court silently awaited their turn.

"I do not profess to be an expert at book-keeping," said Maitland, presently; "but do I understand the judge-advocate to say that the witness Schönberg swears that these entries are correct?"

Lawler briskly turned over the leaves of the record before him.

"Here are his very words," he said. "'I myself made entries for the years '83 and '84, both in the day-book and in the ledger. I kept all Mr. Braine's books. He gave me the items just as they occurred, and these entries were made by me at the different dates in those years just as they were directed by him.'"

"Oh, yes, yes: I remember," said the colonel. "I suppose it is all correct. Possibly other members of the court can tell more about this business than I can." And he passed the book down the table.

"Nothing could be more confirmatory of Schönberg's statements," said the judge-advocate, loudly. "One has only to look at these pages. You can see that different ink, different pens, have been used here,—*primâ facie* evidence of their having been entered at totally different times, instead of being jotted down at once, as might be claimed by the defence but for this significant fact." And Lawler looked triumphantly

about the room, ending with a glance at the little group that was near Hearn's table.

Miss Marshall was leaning forward, her dark eyes eagerly scanning the faces of the members of the court, and watching the books as they passed from hand to hand. Hearn, pale and patient, seemed waiting for the court to finish before asking that he, too, be permitted to examine the books.

"Do you suppose you could get them one moment?" whispered Miss Marshall to the major, who was sitting at her left. "I had to study books and book-keeping once."

"I'll try," whispered Kenyon. "Hearn will, anyhow."

It was some time before they reached the foot of the table. Captain Thorp and his next neighbor spent several minutes in studying the dates and figures, and at last handed them successively to the junior member. As soon as this gentleman had finished his scrutiny of the first, Lieutenant Hearn held forth his hand:

"I presume I may be permitted to examine these exhibits?"

"I submit to the court that the accused has had frequent opportunity any time these last three months to examine these books, that he has been importuned, even, to do so, time and again, and has contemptuously refused. In view of these facts, his anxiety to see them now strikes me as an assumption." Lawler's manner was loud and truculent. He knew he was making a point.

"Assumption or not," said the president, coolly, as Hearn's face flushed hotly under the sting, "it is the undoubted right of the accused to see any exhibit produced in court."

"I feel bound, then, to prevent their being improperly dealt with while in his hands," said Lawler, hanging on to his volumes and bent on making the scene as effective as possible.

"I will take all responsibility, sir. You may be sure the accused will not injure them," was Grace's prompt and indignant rejoinder.

And so, having interfered as long as possible, the lawyer grudgingly handed the book to Mr. Hearn, ostentatiously holding it open so that all near at hand could see the array of items and figures charged against him. In doing so he even raised the volume to the level of his own shoulder, and the leaf flapped lazily open until it stood in bold relief.

Never moving from her seat, Miss Marshall, with glowing eyes and compressed lips, had silently noted every word and motion. She was bending forward eagerly, as though striving at a distance of six or seven feet to decipher the writing on the page thus glaringly exhibited. When finally Lawler laid it on the table and Mr. Hearn began slowly studying the page, she still retained her position. Forgetful, apparently, of everything around her, the young girl was now so near that she could have touched the table at which sat the accused soldier.

Studying with pained, troubled face, Mr. Hearn at last began slowly turning over the pages and looking at the headings of the other accounts. There was something which he evidently desired to satisfy himself about, yet everything looked straight and plausible. Again bent on taking every opportunity to score a point against the accused, Lawler suddenly arose:

"I submit again, if the court will but hear me, that, while the accused has been accorded the privilege of examining his long-neglected account, he has no right whatever to pry into the affairs of other officers. I maintain that he should be compelled to confine his attention to his own page: there is quite enough there."

Kenyon suddenly felt a slim white hand gripping his wrist like a vice. Hearn was just turning down a page after briefly scanning the dates, but a rustle at his side attracted his attention. To his amazement, Miss Marshall had bent forward out of her chair and was eagerly motioning and whispering to him:

"Again! Let me see through that page again."

The court was discussing at the instant the question raised by Lawler. Maitland and Thorp protested that Hearn had a right to compare other accounts with his own if he suspected fraud of any kind. Hearn himself, with throbbing heart, could only see and hear her. Obedient to her signal, he again raised the leaf, and would have turned the book, so that she could read it right side up, but with imperious gesture she forbade.

"Hold it as it is," she signalled, as, still bending low, she seemed studying every line of the paper thus vertically placed between her and the sunshine flooding in at the open barrack window.

"Quick, now! More! more!" she motioned. And, wondering, he turned several pages, holding each a moment or two. But she shook her head impatiently and signalled, "Go on!" until in succession half a dozen leaves were turned; then, with eager light in her eyes, again she held up a warning hand, and the page was stopped.

"Very well, then," Lawler was saying at this moment, with sarcastic emphasis. "On the principle that misery loves company, I suppose we must accord him the privilege of viewing the accounts of his fellow-debtors." And, with this fresh piece of civil legal practice on his lips, the judge-advocate turned to the group on his left and stopped short in amaze.

Hearn, utterly lost to what was going on, was gazing with all his eyes at Miss Marshall, who, flushed, eager, almost radiant, once more was leaning back in her chair, but signalling to close the book. It was Kenyon now who was half rising and whispering sudden impetuous words to Hearn.

For a moment Lawler knew not what to think or say. Something told him that the cause he represented was in peril. A sense of disaster flashed upon him.

"At least the accused will have the decency to refrain from exhibiting officers' private accounts to the public," he said, with sudden return to his old manner, "and, if he be through with the examination, return these exhibits to me, that I may close the case,—unless, perhaps, he desires to offer something further upon this subject."

Miss Marshall's fingers were twisting a tiny slip on which she had hurriedly pencilled a word or two. One instant more, and it was with Hearn. She had bent forward to pick up a fluttering scrap of paper; her deft fingers had but for the instant touched his drooping hand. Opening it, he read, "Recall Schönberg instantly." Surprised, he

glanced at her, but purposely she had averted her eyes. Kenyon was vehemently nodding.

"I must ask that Mr. Schönberg be recalled," said Hearn. "There is new matter here, upon which I need to question him."

"The accused has already had opportunity to cross-examine the witness, and has no further right," said Lawler.

"I repeat that there is new matter before the court in the introduction of these exhibits, on which I have a perfect right to question," replied Hearn.

"It is simply delaying matters," persisted Lawler. "When the accused said he had no further questions to ask, yesterday, I excused the witness, and he is now miles away, and cannot be had until morning, if he can then."

"The man is not fifty feet away at this moment," said Kenyon, with sharp emphasis and a voice that rang through the room.

"When did the gentleman become counsel in this case, I beg to know?" sneered the judge-advocate. "I protest against this disorder and interference with the court."

"Major Kenyon gives us important information, Colonel Lawler," said Grace, "and if the man is here the court desires that he be recalled at once."

Lawler reddened with wrath. "If you know where he is, call him in," said he to Kenyon. And all eyes were turned to the door, where presently, escorted by the orderly of the court, Mr. Schönberg appeared, hat in hand, bowing profusely and politely to the court, yet looking, as Mr. Martin expressed it, "rather pasty about the gills." He was scuttling down the back stairs when headed off by the provost-sergeant. He had doubtless heard the summons for his recall, and had hoped to get out of the way. All eyes but Hearn's and Kenyon's, Mabel Lane's and Georgia's, were upon him. With lightning speed the latter was writing a little note, and this, too, a moment later, was in the young lieutenant's hand. He read it. A wild light of wonderment and incredulity leaped into his face. He hastily raised the volume between him and the opposite window, held a leaf between him and the sunshine, gazed quickly and earnestly, and then, laying the book once more on the table, turned with swimming eyes and looked full upon her, his lips quivering, his face aglow with joy, hope, gratitude, and a fervor of admiration and worship no woman on earth could fail to see; but Georgia's downcast face was hidden; she had drawn her fan like Spartan shield between her glowing cheek and the kindling eyes she dared not meet.

It was Lawler's rasping voice that recalled the young soldier to his senses:

"Well, sir, the witness is here."

There was a silence as of solitude in the great heated room. Obedient to the clumsy formality of a military court, Mr. Hearn slowly wrote his question on a slip of paper and handed it to the judge-advocate: the latter read it, threw it down, and pettishly exclaimed,—

"This is mere waste of valuable time, I say. The witness has practically answered this all before."

"What is the question?" asked the president.

"The accused asks the witness to state to the court what reason he has for being so positive about the time these entries were made. So long as my witness *is* positive, I conceive it to be no affair of the defence why or how he is."

"Oh, I see no especial object in the question," said Grace, "yet there is no impropriety in asking it. At all events, I am entirely willing to bear the responsibility. The witness will answer."

Could he but have seen the flash of gratitude in Miss Marshall's eyes! It was only a flash. Almost instantly again they were fixed on the pudgy features of the witness.

"Why, certainly, gentlemen, I can answer. Mr. Braine died in the spring of '85, and couldn't have told me to make those entries after he was dead, could he? No. They were made, just as I said, in the winter of '83 and during the year of '84, just when he told me to make them."

"Are you satisfied?" asked the judge-advocate, turning sharply to Hearn.

"One moment," answered that young gentleman, placidly, as his pencil rapidly copied another question on the slip before him. Finishing this, he arose. "I beg to ask the especial attention of the court to this question," he said.

There fell a hush as of death upon the throng. With parted lips Georgia Marshall again bent eagerly forward until she could see the Jew's twitching face. Schönberg turned a shade paler and glanced half appealingly up at the lawyer, who, with a sneer of assumed contempt, held forth his hand for the slip. But Hearn looked straight into Lawler's eyes. The judge-advocate took the paper, turned it carelessly over, elevated his nose with apparent indifference, leaned back in his chair, glanced at it,—started.

"Let me see that book," he exclaimed, as he sprang to his feet, holding forth an eager hand.

"Presently, sir," answered Hearn, holding the volume behind him. "Kindly put the question first."

"Don't let that book go!" whispered Miss Marshall, hastily, her words addressed to Kenyon, yet meant for and heard by Hearn. Mabel Lane's face was flushing with excitement. Every eye in the room was intent on the scene.

"What is the question, Mr. Judge-Advocate?" sharply inquired Colonel Grace. "Why do you seek to suppress it?"

"I protest against the insinuation, sir. I simply seek to protect an honest man from insult. I ask the accused for a book that I may satisfy myself he has reason for a question otherwise unjustifiable."

"Mr. President, I demand the question as a right!" exclaimed Hearn, in tones thrilling with excitement and ringing through the court. "The witness has sworn he made these entries in '83 and '84. Look, gentlemen, look at this page, one and all, and compel the answer."

He sprang forward and laid the book in Grace's hand:

"Hold it to the light, sir. Look at the water-mark. I demand an answer to my question."

Trembling with emotion, his blue eyes ablaze, his fingers working nervously, the young soldier towered above the heads of the court. Every breath in all the great room seemed hushed, though hearts beat and hammered like mad. All eyes were on Grace now, as he adjusted his glasses, held the page aloft, and scrutinized the paper. Then, with a quick gleam in his sharp old eyes, he beckoned excitedly to Maitland, pointed with his forefinger to the waving lines of the water-marks, and dropped the book upon the table, his finger between the leaves, a threatening frown on his brow.

"Put the question, Mr. Judge-Advocate," his stern voice was heard through the room.—"And you, sir, answer."

Lawler hesitated one minute, glancing dubiously around. Then, as though seeing the hopelessness of resistance, he read, in accents that trembled despite his efforts, these words:

"How was it possible for you to write in '83 and '84 on paper that was not manufactured until two years afterward?"

XVI.

When, half an hour later, Colonel Lawler announced that, in view of circumstances to which the court appeared to attach so much significance, he would rest the case for the prosecution, he had, despite every effort, and the professional bravado assumed for such occasions, all the air of a whipped man. For half a minute after hearing that stunning question Mr. Schönberg had sat glaring at the judge-advocate, his eyes protruding, his mouth wide open, his face ghastly white. Then he mopped his forehead, recalled to himself by Grace's sharp tones, as the president again demanded answer, and faltered out,—

"I ton't uuderstand the question."

"You are called upon to explain to this court how it was possible for you to have made those entries in '83 and '84, as you have solemnly sworn you did, when the paper itself was not made until 1886," thundered Grace; "and the court is waiting for your answer."

"The paper vasn't made until 1886?" faltered Schönberg.

"No, sir!" fairly shouted the wrathful old soldier in the president's chair. "No, sir! You failed to study the water-marks. Here it is repeated on a score of these leaves: 'Sconset Valley Mills, 1886.' I say, explain this if you can."

"I ton't know anything about that," muttered the Jew at last, gulping down the big lump that arose in his throat. "I know when I made those entries, anyhow."

But the whole roomful could see that the wretch was only lying,—desperately lying. The pencils of the correspondents were flying over their blocks with furious speed. One excited ambassador of the press had already made a lunge through the crowd for the door-way.

"Mr. Judge-Advocate," said the president, at last, "I fancy you can now excuse your witness from further attendance. Stop, though.—Have you anything else you would wish to ask, Mr. Hearn?" And now his manner was all courtesy.

"Not a word, sir," was the smiling answer. "I shall beg to submit the list of my witnesses in a few moments."

People seemed to draw aside and make a wide lane for the wretched Hebrew and his crest-fallen counsellor, as the latter led his unscrupulous witness to the outer gallery, whither Lawler said he desired to retire for a moment's consultation. So entire had been the confidence of the mass of the people in the guilt of the officer that Schönberg's shady reputation had not sufficed to warn them of the possibilities in the case. But among educated and better-informed people present there broke forth suddenly, after a moment's breathless silence, a ripple of applause that speedily swelled into a joyous burst of hand-clapping which was taken up all over the room, and for a moment, mingled with angry hisses on the part of a few pronounced socialists in the throng, who were furious at the sudden turn in favor of the hated official class, the clamor was unchecked. Stern as he was, old Grace could not deny the audience the right of such a reaction. Then he rapped for order.

"You are not ready, I presume, to proceed with your defence?" said Lawler, a moment after, as he re-entered the room and glanced nervously around. All his airy, confident manner was gone. He looked almost dazed.

"Certainly," was the prompt reply. "Have the goodness to call in Private Welsh."

"May it please the court," said Lawler, "I submit that the accused should furnish the list of witnesses he desires to summon, in order that it may be determined for what purpose they are called, and whether the expense will be justified," said Lawler, in response. "And as for Welsh, I maintain that that unfortunate trooper has already suffered too much at the hands of the accused to warrant his being subjected to further ignominy, as he would be if the court allowed such treatment as was accorded my last witness."

"If he is at all like your last witness, Colonel Lawler, ignominy will not inaptly express the idea," was Grace's sarcastic response; whereat "an audible grin" spread over the room.

"Do you wish to summon witnesses from abroad, Mr. Hearn?"

"Not one, sir. Every man I need will be at the post by one o'clock this afternoon; and, except Welsh, who is understood to be under the especial charge of the judge-advocate and amenable to orders from nobody else, I will not trouble the court to call on anybody: the others will be glad to come."

Lawler shook his head and looked dissatisfied. If he could only know the men whom the defence was introducing and could find out what they meant to testify, it might be still in his power to avert at least public catastrophe. Shrewd enough to see the evident antagonism he had created, and knowing that matters were going topsy-turvy at the moment, he bethought him of a ruse by which he could get rid of the crowd:

"I beg the indulgence of the court. I have allowed the case for the prosecution to rest rather than infringe longer on time that is so valuable, but I find myself unable to proceed at this moment, and I beg that you take a recess until two P.M."

The court demurred. It was utterly adverse to a recess. Hearn's witnesses were all ready to proceed,—four or five, at least.

"What is the need?" asked Thorp and Maitland, neither of whom felt like giving Lawler an inch of leeway. But courtesy to the staff-officer of the division commander prevailed.

It was barely eleven o'clock when the throng came pouring forth from the court-room, and Lawler hoped that, rather than wait three hours, the mass of the people would depart. But his hopes were vain. If anything, the number seemed augmented. The noon train brought a couple of car-loads from the eastward towns. It also brought a sergeant and private of infantry escorting a dilapidated-looking party in shabby civilian dress whom old Kenyon, the adjutant, and a file of the post-guard were at the station to meet. The stranger was bundled into an ambulance and trotted up to the guard-house, into which he slouched with hanging head and an air of general dejection; and while the men were at their soldier dinner Kenyon was busily interviewing his tough-looking prisoner, a squad of excited newspaper men, meantime, kicking their heels outside and raging at the military assumption which gave the post commander precedence over the press. The word had gone out all over the crowded garrison that the escaped prisoner Goss was recaptured, and the commanding officer's orderly had been rushed with a note to the provost-sergeant.

"You bet he'll not get away," muttered this veteran of Brodie's company, as he glanced along the lively mess-room, where the big bowls of bean soup were being emptied by rare soldier appetites. "You bet he don't, unless he can carry a cart-load of lead in him."

Twenty minutes after, Corporal Greene of the guard came to the door-way and sung out,—

"Say, fellers, who do you think's captured and brought back? Trooper Goss, begad, the bosom friend of the patriotic Welsh."

And Welsh dropped his spoon and his eyes and turned a dirty yellow. He essayed presently to quit the table, but the old sergeant bent over him:

"Finish yer dinner, me buck. Don't let eagerness to see yer friend spoil yer appetite. You can't see him, anyway, till he has given his testimony before the court; and they'll want you, too, Welsh, me jewel, and I'm charged not to lose you,—d'ye mind that, Welsh?—and I never lose anything but an occasional slice of me temper. Ate yer dinner, like the high-spirited American ye are, now." But Welsh's appetite was gone.

The court-room was crowded to suffocation that afternoon when, sharp at two o'clock, Colonel Grace rapped for order:

"I suppose you are ready now, Colonel Lawler? Call in the first witness."

Lawler looked resigned, even martyred. The court had come back from luncheon at the Lanes' in high spirits. The ladies again sat close to Hearn's table. Private Goss, with untrimmed beard and an air of general dilapidation, was sworn by the judge-advocate, gave his name, rank, regiment, etc., and responded, in answer to Lawler's question, that he did know the accused very well.

"What do you want to ask the witness?" said Lawler, in a tone as much as to say, What *could* you ask that would be of any earthly account?

"State where and how long you have known Private Welsh, C troop, Eleventh Cavalry," were the words on the pencilled slip, and Lawler read them grudgingly.

"I've known him six or eight years. Knew him when he enlisted in the Twenty-Third, where he went by the name of Webster. Served with him at Fort Wayne until he got a 'bobtail' discharge, and when I got mine I went to his home in Ohio and hunted him up. He owed me money, but he was no good,—couldn't pay it. His people wouldn't do anything more for him. He was Mrs. Blauvelt's nephew, but she had about got tired of trying to support him, so we came away and enlisted again, in the cavalry service this time, and then he got things fixed to go into Blauvelt's troop for both of us."

"What was your reason for deserting here while awaiting trial?" was the next question.

"Well, both Welsh and Schönberg told me I was bound to be convicted. Everything pointed to my being Corporal Brent's slugger, though I swear to God I never left the barracks that night. They said if I didn't get away before the court tried me I might get several years in State's prison at hard labor, and worse still if he didn't recover. Welsh and Schönberg both said that there was no show for me, the evidence was so clear, even to the red pepper in the pockets. Some scoundrel put it there, and wore my things, too. Welsh got put into the guard-room, purposely, opposite my cell, and threw a stone with a string through the grating, and I hauled on it and got a letter from him and Schönberg telling me how to escape. There were saws and tallow in the package I drew in, and Schönberg was down in the bottom with a buggy after I got out, and he drove me nearly all night around by way of Barclay to the other road, and sent me by rail to Omaha, where he promised that plenty of money would come to me; but no money came at all, and I was recognized and arrested by the police."

"Had you any idea that there were other reasons for getting you to desert than the one given?"

Lawler bounced up and objected to both question and answer; but both were ordered recorded.

"I hadn't—then," was the sullen reply: "I'm not so sure now. That Jew got me to go because I accused him of being a receiver of stolen property. It was him Welsh gave the papers he took from the lieutenant's desk in Captain Blauvelt's quarters. I went there with him one night after taps when the lieutenant was officer of the guard, and Schönberg gave Welsh ten dollars and me five to keep mum. After that Welsh began to run with Schönberg entirely and turn against me, and it was through him that I was always getting into trouble."

In vain Lawler propounded questions tending to show his witness, thus assailed, in a better light; but the more he examined the more damaging was Goss's testimony. At last the witness slouched out under escort of a sentinel.

But a greater sensation still was awaiting the patient listeners in

the court-room. The next man to enter, leaning heavily on the arm of the hospital steward, and accompanied by Dr. Ingersoll, was Corporal Brent, looking white and feeble, but very calm and self-possessed.

"Give your full name, rank, and regiment," said the judge-advocate, without looking up.

"The name under which I enlisted is Malcolm Brent, corporal Company C, —th Infantry."

"The court will note, I trust, the singular character of the witnesses introduced by the accused," said Lawler, promptly. "The last, by his own admission, is a thief and a deserter whom Welsh very properly essayed to cut loose from on discovering his real character; and now we have a second who plainly intimates that the name he gives is not his own."

"It is the one by which he is known to military law all the same, Colonel Lawler. Please to proceed," said Colonel Grace, testily.

"You know the accused, I presume, or he would not have called upon you?" was Lawler's snapping query of the witness.

"Only as a soldier knows an officer whom he has every reason to respect. I have never exchanged a word with the gentleman, but I recognize him as Lieutenant Hearn, of the Eleventh Cavalry."

Again there was a ripple of applause in the crowded court, which brought Lawler, angry and protesting, to his feet. Silence restored, he presently read aloud the next question from a slip handed him by Mr. Hearn, which he slowly pasted on the sheet before him:

"What do you know with regard to the amounts charged against the accused on the books presented before this court and alleged to be unpaid?"

"I know that they were paid long ago. I heard the story of the whole transaction from the lips of Captain Rawlins himself."

"Hearsay evidence," promptly interrupted the judge-advocate, rapping on the table.

"But Schönberg's written acknowledgment and this letter of Captain Rawlins will not be so considered," answered the witness, respectfully, and, bending forward, he placed on the judge-advocate's table a little package of papers. The court-room was hushed. Even the pencils of the correspondents were arrested. Every eye in all the throng was on the pale face of the young corporal. Members of the court had whirled around in their chairs, so as to look full upon the new witness. Old Kenyon, with lifted spectacles, brimming over with eagerness and excitement, was fidgeting on his chair. Pretty Mrs. Lane, all smiles, was keeping her fan in lively yet noiseless play. Georgia Marshall's heavily-fringed lids were drooping over her downcast eyes; but the soft, summer fabric of her dress rose and fell upon her bosom like the billows of an unquiet sea. She was seated where every word of the witness could reach her ears, but no longer so near the little table where sat the calm young soldier whose trial had nearly reached an end. There was no longer need of counsel for the accused; yet his eyes, time and again, glanced yearningly at her.

Lawler was the first to speak. He dandled the papers contemptuously as he glanced them over:

"These are of no earthly account,—mere forgeries, possibly. One only purports to be a duplicate, anyhow."

"Duplicate of what, sir? The court will be glad to look at those papers when you are through with them," said Colonel Grace.

"I object to their introduction as evidence, in any event, and protest against their admission here. What possible business can a corporal of infantry be having with the private papers of a deceased officer, anyway?—Where did you know the late Captain Rawlins,—even supposing that he did write that letter?"

"Any question on that score the court may choose to ask I will answer," was the reply, with quiet self-possession. "But I can swear to the genuineness of both papers."

Captain Thorp had already possessed himself of the duplicate receipt, and, after a brief glance, tossed it over to the opposite member.

"Schönberg, without a doubt," he whispered.

Meantime, old Grace had received and was conning over the other, which he suddenly lowered and looked in amaze at the calm face of the witness, then handed it to Maitland, who read, started, and gazed too.

"I know this hand, sir. I know it as that of an old and valued friend," said Maitland, with lips that quivered perceptibly. "I could almost swear to its genuineness myself. It is probably one of the last letters the dear old fellow ever wrote, and it is to his boy at college. Here, Thorp, you read it aloud." And, though Lawler would have protested, protest was useless. Thorp arose, clicking his heels together as though on drill, and, in a voice that was audible all over the big room, read:

"FORT GRAHAM, NEW MEXICO, June 14, 188–.

"MY DEAR MALCOLM,—

"It seems hardly possible that three weeks ago I was with you under the elms of the old campus, listening to college glees and seeing the glad faces of your class-mates,—as manly a set of young fellows as it was ever my lot to meet,—and now here I am again in harness under a blazing sun, with arid, sandy wastes on every side, and not a leaf that is not shrivelled by the fierce rays. I find the old post much as I left it; but I go over to San Carlos in a day or two on court-martial duty, and so am writing my letters to-night.

"In the first place, you will be glad to know that the gold leaves are in sight. If all goes well, I shall become major of the Seventh and be ordered eastward within the next six months. Then I shall fit out my quarters in cosey style, and as soon as Mamie has finished her next year at Madame's she shall come and keep house for me and turn the heads of the youngsters. Yet I do not want her to marry in the army, any more than I want you to enter it. Think of it, Malcolm, for twenty-five years now have I followed the standard, and if anything were to take me away what have I to leave you and May? Little or nothing. Even if you were to turn over your modest share to her, as you so gayly spoke of doing, and enlisting in hopes of winning a commission, she would not have more than enough to keep her from want; though so long as your aunt Eleanor lives she will never be in

need of a home. Ah, well, God spare me a little longer! I so pray to live to see you both happily settled before I am called hence.

"After our talk I cannot but hope that you will see how little there is to look forward to in the career of a soldier in our service,—in peace times, of course. But if the longing prove too great I will not stand in your way. The life has its attractions. You will never have stancher or truer friends than those who wear the blue. But it has its trials and perils outside of those encountered in the field. I told you of the case of young Mr. Hearn, as fine a soldier as there is in the regiment to-day, yet he was well-nigh ruined through having fallen into the hands of the Jews when young and inexperienced. Wasn't it luck that I should have known of the previous rascality of that clerk, and so was able to make him come to terms? Here is his duplicate receipt in full, filed carefully away among my papers. It was the means of saving a capital officer, too.

"Your letters bring constant joy to me, my son. If it had but pleased God to spare your dear mother, I know well how proud and happy a woman she would have been in her great boy and bonny daughter; but His will be done. I may not write again before leaving for San Carlos, but my blessing goes with every line of this. There is such comfort in the frankness with which you told me of those college debts. Trust me fully; confide in me in any trouble, my son; no man can ever be more devotedly your friend than I,—your father. The draft I sent will doubtless have removed all care and anxiety and left you a little sum to the fore. Spend it as you please, yet 'do not dull thy palm with entertainment of each new-hatched, unfledged comrade.' What words of wisdom spoke that fond old fool! but he loved his boy as I love mine.

"Good-night, my lad.

> "This above all, to thine own self be true;
> And it must follow, as the night the day,
> Thou canst not then be false to any man.

"Your father,
"R. F. Rawlins."

For a moment after Thorp's deep voice had ceased its task, the silence in the heated room was broken only by some half-stifled sigh. Corporal Brent had covered his pale face with his hands. Mrs. Lane was weeping silently. Hearn's eyes, swimming, were turned towards Georgia Marshall, who was bending over her friend, quietly fanning her. The effect of this letter was not unexpected: she had heard every word before.

It was Grace who spoke at last, after no little preparatory clearing of his throat:

"And have you other letters from Captain Rawlins?"

"Many, sir, but this was the last," was the almost tremulous answer: "he was killed within the week that followed."

"And you are——?"

"Malcolm Brent Rawlins, his son."

XVII.

The court had finished its labors and gone. The correspondents had gone, but presumably only to renewed labors. The various journals throughout the Northwest that had so confidently predicted the summary dismissal of the offending lieutenant were now in a somewhat difficult position. They had started in to prove the officer a blackguard and the private a martyr; the result was exactly the opposite, and the problem was now how to get out of the pickle. To the average man, soldier or civilian, the consciousness of having publicly wronged a fellow-being would have proved a source of distress so deep that nothing short of retraction as public and apology as far-reaching as the affront would satisfy the offender. But, in its Jove-like attitude as censor of the morals and manners of the people, the press has no such qualms of conscience. As one eminent journalist expressed it, "Of course we are sorry we were misled, somewhat, but we can't take back what has been said: that injures the paper." And of course as between injuring the paper and injuring the man it is the man who must suffer. Another gifted editor, in whose eyes no benefit was quite to be compared with free advertising, expressed himself as considering that "That young fellow really ought to feel very much obliged to us; nine-tenths of the people might never have heard of him at all if it hadn't been for this." And he spoke in all seriousness.

Of course the correspondents themselves had long since seen the inevitable results, and had duly prepared their respective papers for the crash. Some of these journals promptly dropped the matter at once and for all, as no longer worthy of attention; others transferred their assaults from the array of lieutenants to the array of courts-martial. Others still, too deeply committed to extricate themselves, threw open their columns to any damaging story affecting the army which their correspondents could fabricate; and those papers which made any reference to the facts elicited before the court did so in the smallest type, but head-lined the item in sarcastic or explosive big capitals. The *Palladium*, or rather its editorial head, when explaining matters to a knot of men at the club, quietly justified the course of his paper by saying, "We did not send Mr. Abrams there at all; he had gone to Central City on some personal business of his own, to look into some property, and while there this Mr. Schönberg, a wealthy, prominent, and, as we supposed, reputable business-man, told him about the offensive manners of the officers to the people, and offered to prove that they would be insulted and ostracized if they ventured to visit the garrison; and Abrams got warmed up and telegraphed to the managing editor that he was 'on to a good thing,' and so we wired him to go ahead." But a junior member of the editorial staff frankly admitted that he, in common with other journalists, had for sixteen years been "laying" for a chance, as he expressed it, to get in a good whack at the young West-Pointer, and here they thought they had it.

Meantime, the record had gone to department head-quarters for the action of the general commanding, and Lawler went with it to fight the case to the last. There was not a soul at Ryan that did not know

that, though the lips of the court were sealed, the finding had been "not guilty" on every possible specification. All Lawler could hope to do now was to persuade the general to pick the proceedings to pieces and rasp the court in his review of the case; but even this proved futile. The general, it seemed, would do nothing of the kind; it was even hinted that he rasped Lawler for the very one-sided investigation that he made at the outset.

For two days following the adjournment of the court Fort Ryan was fairly in a ferment. Schönberg, terrified by the jeers of his townspeople to the belief that he was to be prosecuted for perjury, had slid away on a night train,—"gone to purchase goods in St. Louis," said his unhappy spouse. Welsh, the martyr, had essayed to desert the same night, and, as a cat plays with a mouse, old Kenyon had let him go until the intent was made plain by his boarding the eastward-bound train in civilian dress, and then had had him hauled off by two stalwart infantrymen and, incidentally, by the nape of his neck, and once more Welsh was remanded to his familiar haunt,—the guard-house at Ryan. This time a still more serious charge was hanging over his head,—that of assaulting a non-commissioned officer in discharge of his duty; for Corporal Brent had recognized him as his assailant the instant he heard his voice. So had another witness. It was Georgia Marshall who turned to Kenyon the moment Welsh had finished his testimony, and said, "I have heard that man speak before," and who unhesitatingly declared after Goss appeared that, though by sight she could identify neither man, by voice she knew that the one who had assaulted the corporal of the guard that night was not Goss, but Welsh. Then Welsh himself broke down. Such was the feeling against him among the men, such were the threats which he could not but hear as he lay in his barred cell, that he begged to be allowed to see the commanding officer. He was in fear for his life,—poor devil! and indeed nothing but the discipline so derided of the newspapers saved him from the tarring and feathering and riding on a rail that the soldiers were wild to give him. In piteous accents he implored Kenyon to have him sent away, even to prison at Leavenworth. He would plead guilty to desertion, guilty to theft, guilty to assault, guilty to anything, if the major would only get him away from the terrible scowls and curses of his erstwhile companions. Only, if the major would but believe him, he really had never struck the corporal at all; he had hurled the pepper in his eyes and run. Brent, blinded and raging, had rushed in pursuit, and had struck his head against the sharp edge of the brick pillar at the south end of the troop-barracks. Very possibly this was true; for the gash was deep and jagged.

And Brent was convalescing rapidly, but, between the ladies of the Lane, Brodie, Cross, and Graves households, stood in danger of being killed with kindness. There was just the least little spark of jealousy among the women of the infantry because it was to a comparative stranger that he should have revealed his identity and by her be brought to the front at so supreme a moment. But it was Miss Marshall who had been greatly interested in his case from the very night of his mishap, and she and Mrs. Lane had been most kind and assiduous in their

attentions to him during his days of suffering. When he learned of the charges against Lieutenant Hearn and of the outrageous falsification of the Jew, Schönberg, his determination to conceal his name was at last overcome, and to Miss Marshall and to Dr. Ingersoll he told his story. His father's sudden and lamentable death at the hands of the Apaches had left him no alternative but to make over to his sister every cent that had been hoarded up and set aside for his education,—every cent that was his by the old soldier's will,—and then, leaving with her the little box that contained the captain's papers and letters, and quitting college, he went to New York and enlisted, choosing the infantry service rather than the cavalry because his father's old friends and associates were mainly in the latter, and, though he had seen none of them since his boyhood days, he thought recognition not impossible, and he determined to make his own way and owe nothing to any man.

"I'm glad he came to us," said old Kenyon. "I'd do pretty much anything to see him in any other profession; but, as he is bound to be a soldier, I'll do all I can to place 'Candidate' alongside his name on our muster-roll, and then it would be just my luck to find him commissioned in the cavalry."

But if there was excitement at Ryan, just fancy the feelings of the officers and men in the Eleventh, now two hundred miles away in the Indian Territory, when the letters came detailing the events of the last day of that court-martial,—Schönberg's exposure, Brent's unveiling, Welsh's disgrace, Hearn's undoubted acquittal, Lawler put to confusion and flight, and Georgia Marshall the heroine of the whole thing!

"A Daniel come to judgment, ay, a Daniel," quoth Martin, as Lane read aloud Mabel's enthusiastic description of what she termed the "trial scene." "The whole regiment sends heart-felt congratulations to Hearn and love to Portia," was the telegram that came flashing back to Mrs. Lane. Morris lost no time in dictating a diplomatic message to his absent subaltern, expressive of his desire to welcome him back to duty after so complete a vindication. But Morris felt very ill at ease, and was not surprised that no answer was vouchsafed. He retired to his tent, and was not seen for some hours after learning of Brent's identity.

Meantime, just when one would suppose that all was plain sailing, balmy breezes, sun-kissed wavelets, etc., just when nothing should have stood in the way of Mr. Hearn's rejoicing with all his heart, and just when the course of his true love ought to have been smooth and sweet, the very imp of perversity seemed to have suddenly developed in Georgia Marshall's breast, and she who had done so much to clear his name of "the clouds that lowered o'er" it, and had for two weeks been the young soldier's most valued friend and ally, now most unaccountably held aloof and fairly shunned his society. She met him only in a crowd. She simply would not meet him alone. On one pretext or another she avoided him, and poor Hearn, wounded, utterly unable to account for this sudden change, utterly incapable of fathoming a woman's whim, was now plunged in the depths of a distress exceeding that from which he had just emerged. She had rescued him from the toils only to plunge him into worse entanglement.

It was the fourth day after the adjournment of the court when Major

Kenyon came to Mr. Hearn's rooms with a telegram just received from division head-quarters, and found that young gentleman dejectedly reading a long letter in the handwriting of Judge Hearn, his father. Kenyon had grown to know it well. "Released from arrest, lad! That means you can go and join the regiment as soon as you like. What does the judge say now?"

"Read that page," was the answer, as Hearn placed the letter in the major's hand. And with knitted brows Kenyon read as follows:

"And now again I urge upon you, my son, the step I so earnestly counselled in my last. Major Kenyon's telegram just received says that your acquittal is assured and that your vindication is triumphant. This I felt would be the case. But what reparation have you for the wrongs and insults heaped upon you by the Northern press? What proportion of the people who have had you portrayed to them as a low bully, a drunken brute, and a swindler will ever know the contrary? What paper that has vilified you will have the decency or the courage, now that it knows the truth, to make the faintest amends? Not one.

"The time has come for you now to quit at once and for all a profession which the people of the North so little appreciate and so persistently decry. I am aging fast, and shall be glad to have your strong arm to lean upon. A year or two in my office will fit you for the bar. Meantime, you can have nearly double the income that the government pays you, and when I am gone all I have, practically, will be yours. Come back to us, my boy; come to the mother, the father, and the people who love you; come home to us who know and need you: you are not wanted where you are."

For some time Major Kenyon stood in silence. At last, seeing that he was expected to express his opinion, he slowly spoke:

"I feared that that first letter would come, and I might have known that this would follow. When will you answer?"

"Not just yet. I must think it over. Not—not until after to-night, anyway."

That evening Mrs. Morris insisted upon everybody's coming to her house "to celebrate." The news that Hearn had been released by telegraphic orders was all over the post in half an hour, and that he would start to rejoin the regiment in the field was of course a foregone conclusion. Only, said that all-important personage referred to generally as "everybody,"—only he will probably want to delay a little while on Miss Marshall's account, for if they are not already engaged it is solely her fault; any one can see he is utterly in love with her.

Once in a while "everybody" makes a mistake. This time "everybody" was practically right. No one more thoroughly than Hearn himself knew how utterly he was in love with Georgia Marshall, and nobody but Kenyon knew that, yielding to the plea in his father's letter, Hearn might not return to the regiment at all.

It was a joyous gathering at the Morrises'; and yet there had been a singular conversation at the Lanes' before Mabel could induce her friend to go at all.

"Mr. Hearn will certainly come and ask to be your escort," said Mabel, the moment Mrs. Morris was gone. "How can you say no?"

"He will ask you, Mabel, as I shall not be visible, and you must accept. If you will walk over there and back with Mr. Hearn, I will go; otherwise I shall have a splitting headache and be confined to my room."

"How utterly absurd, Portia! Everybody expects him to escort you. No other man in this post will ask you so long as he is here: it is a foregone conclusion that Mr. Hearn will."

"That is why I want you to go with him. If I go it will be with Major Kenyon." And then Miss Marshall took the flushed, perplexed, but lovely face of her hostess between her slender hands and kissed it. "Mabel, I must not go with Mr. Hearn. Some day I'll tell you why." And then she ran to her room.

"Tell me, indeed! I know too well," was the almost tearful answer. "You are prouder, far prouder, than I ever was."

And so, though she gained her point for the time-being, though Hearn had to offer his services to Mrs. Lane when he called and could not see Miss Marshall, though Mabel went on that moody young gentleman's arm and Miss Marshall followed with her stanch friend the major,—Hearn raging with jealous pain the while,—the time came when she found her precaution all of no avail. Mr. Hearn was too much in earnest, too deeply in love, to be longer held at bay.

"Mrs. Lane," he stammered at last, as they were walking homeward late at night, "I must speak to Miss Marshall. Surely you know why. Have I not your good wishes? Will you not help me?"

How could Mabel Lane refuse? Once the gate was reached she bade both men come in, though Miss Marshall would have dismissed the major; and then, slipping from the parlor along the hall-way to the dining-room, she left Miss Marshall to entertain her guests, while with nervous hands she set forth wine, and then presently called Kenyon, as though to her aid. He came instantly, and Miss Marshall would have followed. But Hearn was too quick, and sprang before her to the door-way. For three—four minutes, nervously, incoherently, Mrs. Lane strove to keep up a laughing chat with the bulky major; but he, too, saw the ruse as he sipped his wine, and neither was practised in the art of dissembling. Suddenly Hearn's footsteps, quick and firm, were heard in the hall-way; the front door closed with sudden bang, and, without a word to his hostess, he was gone. Mrs. Lane's heart sank within her. Conversation was at an end. Kenyon stood for an instant in awkward silence. Then Miss Marshall's skirts were heard as she fairly rushed up the stairs, and the major took himself off as quickly as a clumsy man could effect an escape. An instant after, Mabel Lane stood at Georgia's door. It was closed.

"Portia," she called, in low, pleading tones,—"Portia, mayn't I come in?"

For a moment, no answer at all.

"Georgia, dear, *do* speak to me."

At last a quick, impetuous step; the door was thrown open. All was darkness; but as Mrs. Lane entered with outstretched arms, there came a low, almost wailing voice from the bedside:

"Oh, Mabel, Mabel, how could you?"

XVIII.

When it was generally understood around Fort Ryan the following afternoon that Mr. Hearn had taken the first train and gone after the regiment early that morning, people were somewhat surprised. Along toward sunset the ladies began to think it time somebody went to call at the Lanes' and see why it was that neither Mrs. Lane nor Miss Marshall had been abroad during the day. Incidentally, too, it might be possible to find out whether congratulations were in order. Nobody could account for the sudden departure of the lieutenant. Kenyon knew of it, of course, but to all questions would only reply, as though in surprise,—

"Go? Why, of course he went! What else would you expect of a man like Hearn? He was all ready to join his regiment: why shouldn't he go?"

Still, as Mr. Hearn had not said a word about going even when questioned the night before, every woman at Ryan felt sure there was some sudden reason, and equally sure that Miss Marshall, if she only would, could tell it. Very probably the first callers fully expected to be told that Miss Marshall was not well and begged to be excused. That would have settled the matter to their entire satisfaction. But, on the contrary, Miss Marshall, looking every bit as fresh and cool and animated as ever, came tripping lightly down the stairs the moment they were announced. She perfectly well knew that they would be coming, and was fully prepared to meet them. She had heard, too, of Mr. Hearn's sudden departure: a brief note had come to Mrs. Lane early in the morning, over which that bonny matron had had a good cry. The visitors only succeeded in finding Miss Marshall as brilliant and entertaining as ever, but more provokingly inscrutable. It was impossible to determine from her manner in speaking of Mr. Hearn and his departure whether there was an engagement or not.

Nor was any one a whit wiser at the end of the week. "If she is engaged to him," said the dames and damsels, "she is receiving rather too much attention from the major, who lets no day go by without its call, and the calls are growing longer."

Mabel Lane, who had looked pale for a day or two, was blithe and sunshiny as ever, so far as Ryan society could judge; and in the absence of any local sensation some people were disposed to regard the situation as decidedly disheartening. No woman rests content who suspects an engagement and cannot prove it.

Letters from the regiment gave no clue. Lane wrote to Mabel every day,—another thing that made him culpable in the eyes of lords less uxorious,—and she was besieged by the other wives with questions as to what was going on in the field. But what he wrote her of Hearn she would tell no one, not even Georgia,—who never asked.

"It has been a hard ordeal for Hearn, as any one can see," wrote the captain. "He has aged and changed greatly. The youngsters had planned a sort of love-feast for him, but he begged them that nothing of the kind be held, and he has really shunned society since rejoining.

He claims that all his time is taken up with his troop, and of course we are very busy; but there is something behind it, and I think you know."

She did know, and yet could not tell. It was her penance for breaking faith with Georgia. The latter had forbidden that she should tell to any one the fact that Mr. Hearn had indeed offered himself and had been refused.

But Lane learned it soon enough. From the moment of his return to the regiment the young soldier spent most of his time, when off duty, in the society of the captain, and one night in the fulness of his sorrowing heart he told his friend of the bitter disappointment that had come to him. He loved her deeply, had asked her to be his wife, and she had gently, even tearfully, but positively, said no, it simply could not be. He had begged her to give her reasons, and she refused. She assured him of her faith, respect, and esteem, but pointed out to him that in every way possible since the trial she had striven to avert the declaration which she frankly confessed she could not but foresee. He was forced to admit this, and could no longer press her for reasons, since she had plainly discouraged his suit. Yet it was hard,—very hard.

Lane simply could not understand. "Is there any one else?" he wrote to Mabel, and Mabel said she was sure there was not; but she was equally sure Georgia meant no. Mabel, herself, was even more perplexed than the captain, since Georgia had gently but resolutely forbidden any further mention of the subject between them. And now, with the utter inconsistency of her sex, pretty Mrs. Lane was all eagerness to discover and demolish the barrier to a match which a month ago she would have opposed because it seemed inevitable.

Then came a joy in which Mrs. Lane for the time-being forgot her perplexities. Captain Fred obtained a seven days' leave from the regiment and flew as straight to her arms as a circuitous railroad-route could carry him. He greeted Miss Marshall as cordially as ever, but he did not call her Portia as he had intended, because Mabel warned him in a letter that it served to revive associations which were not all joyous. "I called her Portia long before she met Mr. Hearn," was Lane's stout reply; "but if she doesn't like it, that's enough." Major Kenyon was bidden to dinner the evening of his home-coming, and of course many of the garrison people happened in, and so there was nothing but general chat. But two evenings later, when the major was sitting in the big arm-chair and discoursing on some of his favorite hobbies, he broached anew the matter of Judge Hearn's letter urging his son to quit the service.

"Have you never heard Hearn's answer, major?" said Lane. "He read it to me before sending it, and I thought it so good that I kept a copy. Here it is."

Miss Marshall was sitting at the table under the bright lamp as Lane began to read. Mabel noticed that she leaned forward, shading her eyes with her hand.

"I have thought it all over, my dear father. The offer you make me is one for which I thank you with all my heart. Few men could

quit the service under better auspices, or return to a home more loved or friends more loving; and yet—I cannot. Ten years of my life, perhaps the best ten, have been spent in a profession which with every year presents new fields, new studies, and new requirements. I have worked honestly, have won friends, and, in all modesty may say, a good name. Admitting all you write of this recent attempt of the papers to blacken it, my friends here tell me that it but proves the strength of my record that even concerted newspaper assaults could not harm me in the eyes of right-thinking people.

"I love the duties. I am deeply attached to many of my comrades. I can be a very fair soldier, and might only make a very poor lawyer. For these reasons I think I ought to stand where I am. But there is still another reason.

"Father, when I bound myself to the United States as a cadet I received at the hands of the nation a schooling such as I could get at no other institution in the world, and was moulded by the nation for its service. If in after-years I found myself better fitted to serve in some other way, then there might be excuse for tendering a resignation. But when I feel and know that I am far more soldier than I can ever be anything else, it all the more convinces me that my efforts belong now and for a lifetime to the nation that trained me and that I have sworn to serve.

"The dear ones at home know me best, it is true. The class in whose supposed interests I have been so unjustly assailed, it is also true, is very different from that in which we move. But, in the broad light of a soldier's duty, neither the love of the one nor the unreasoning hate of the other should swerve me. The hardest knocks a soldier has to bear come sometimes from the very men whom he is sworn to defend. You would not have me yield because of a stinging wound or two, nor would I be worthy of your name if I faltered now. It is my belief that, despite apparent apathy, there is still, North or South, a place in the hearts of the people for every soldier who seeks faithfully to serve them, and in that faith—God helping me—*I shall follow the old flag to the end.*"

"By Jupiter!" said Kenyon, as he sprang to his feet and strode excitedly up and down the room, "isn't that enough to make one damn the liberty of the press, to think that a month ago it was holding up that fine fellow for everything that was low and contemptible!—Miss Marshall, if I were—— Why, she's gone!"

"Just stepped into the dining-room a moment," said Mrs. Lane, promptly, though her eyes were brimming. "Now, isn't that Mr. Hearn all over!"

But Georgia Marshall had not gone into the dining-room. Mabel found her over at the end of the veranda, gazing at the distant night-lights across the dark and silent valley.

September came, and the Eleventh would soon be on its homeward march. Letters to the regiment made frequent mention of old Kenyon's devotion to Miss Marshall, and even Hearn had to hear occasional bits of conversation that told him that in quitting Ryan he had abandoned the field to a rival. But when orders reached them there

was other news: Miss Marshall was to return to the East at once. "Despite every plea," wrote Mabel, "she persists in it, and adamant is no more yielding than is her determination. I am utterly heart-broken, but cannot prevent it. She has been making arrangements for a new position of some kind for the last six weeks, and she will leave before the regiment gets back."

And when the Eleventh came marching into Ryan late in the month, and a host of tanned and bearded troopers rode in behind the band on its dancing grays, Georgia Marshall had vanished from the scene.

Presently Kenyon took a long leave and disappeared. "Having it out with his newspaper friends in Chicago," was Martin's suggestion. But the next thing heard of him he had turned up in Cincinnati, and Mabel knew well what that meant, and waited with bated breath. For a month there came no further news, and then he was reported at St. Augustine, more crabbed than ever.

"Then he, too, has been rejected," said Mabel. And she was right. Kenyon did not rejoin until long after the Christmas holidays.

Old Blauvelt, by this time, had been sent before a retiring board, which recommended him for permanent shelving, and he was still on leave until the needed vacancy should occur. Hearn, meantime, remained in command of his troop, no longer encumbered by the presence of Trooper Welsh, who had been formally "sent to Leavenworth." Corporal Brent had won his sergeant's chevrons, and was looking forward to examination for promotion. Everything was going blithely at the post, but for the sadness that seemed to have clouded one young soldier's life, and for the anxious look on Mabel Lane's face when Portia was asked for, as Portia often was. "Teaching children all the fall and winter was telling on her," wrote an old school-friend. And when April came she was reported ill, though her own letters made no mention of it. The family would move to their country-seat in a week, and she would be so glad, she said, to see the trees and birds again.

The first of May had come. The lovely suburbs of a bustling city were shrouded in the richest, freshest green. The sweet breath of the early summer, laden with the perfume of lilac and honeysuckle and of myriad blossoms, was sighing through the foliage of a park of grand old trees and rippling the surface of a grassy lawn. Robin and bluebird, oriole and crested woodpecker, flashed and flitted through the sunshine, now splashing in the basin of the fountain, now chasing each other in chattering glee through the slanting light and shadow. The drone of beetle and hum of dragon-fly fell soothingly on the drowsy ear. The little knot of Jerseys browsing in the paddock down the eastward slope huddled together sleepily in a shaded corner. The tennis-court was deserted, the mallets lay sprawled about the croquet-ground, and a pair of Maltese kittens that had been scampering about, playing hide-and-seek among the currant-bushes, seemed at last overcome by the languorous spell in which all nature was hushed, and with

the confidence of kittenhood proceeded to clamber into the slowly-swinging hammock, hung well back in the shade, wherein was reclining the one human being visible in the entire picture,—a tall girl with big dark eyes and a wealth of sombre braids of hair,—a girl whose soft cheeks were almost as thin and pale as the slender white hands loosely clasping an open letter that lay in her lap. And it was this that the foremost pussy, after clambering by swift springs up the pathway afforded by the trailing white skirts, now impatiently pawed to one side and curled herself up in its place; there she was promptly joined by her playmate. Slowly the thin white hand was lifted and gently stroked the fur of the pretty, graceful creature.

"It is a holiday for us, isn't it, Fluffykin?" murmured the girl. "The children and doggy both gone, and it's almost time for us to be thinking of tea,—tea all alone. There's the whistle of the sunset train now."

For a moment the wooded slopes on both sides of the valley echoed to the rattle of the incoming cars, the sharp hiss of steam, the distant sound of voices at the little station down the winding village street, arched over with rustling foliage. Then the clang of the bell, and the hurrying engine again pushed northward, impatient of delay. A few light carriages and pony-phaetons came driving swiftly by; a few of the occupants waved hand or handkerchief to the reclining figure in the hammock, but far more passed by on the other side without a sign or token, and presently silence and solitude again settled down upon the shaded lawn, and the last rays of the westering sun kissed the tree-tops good-night and slowly died away.

"Surely there should be another letter from Mabel to-night: this one is a week old now," said Portia. But, old as it was, there seemed one page which deserved re-reading, and the white hands sought and found the letter and lifted it before her eyes:

"Mr. Hearn has been gone a week now, and we miss him sadly. He had almost made his home here with us during the winter, and rarely spent an evening anywhere else. His father's death seems to have been very sudden, and it was a great shock. He has a month's leave, with permission to apply for an extension. Georgia,—Portia,—I could say so much, so very much, if you would only listen. If you would only release me from that promise! I was thinking but yesterday how I blessed the day that my pride broke down and gave me Fred and happiness. Sometimes I cannot but think that only pride—foolish, unwarrantable pride—stands between you and a life as blessed as my own."

Impatiently the letter was hurled upon the grass, and, half turning, Georgia buried her wan face on her arm. Of what was she thinking? Surely those were hot tears trickling through the long white fingers; surely there was little evidence of stubborn pride in the abandonment of that silent, lonely sorrow. All day she had been at leisure, the family and children away in town, and, though neither her duties had been very onerous nor the trials of her new position very great, she had drooped all winter long. This was the first real day of rest; yet, with all its sweetness and sunshine, had it not been full of tears?—full

of vague unrest and longing? and now even the sunshine was going, and the gloaming was slowly settling down upon the valley. Far over the eastern heights the silvery shield of the soft May moon was peeping into view; but the fairy shafts of her gentle light could not yet penetrate the gathering gloom here in the grove where swung the hammock. Still the hot tears came trickling between the white fingers, and, yielding at last to the mournful influence of the dying day, Georgia Marshall wept unrestrainedly,—wept while great sobs shook her frame; and while one fluffy kitten, disturbed in her intended nap, stretched forth a furry paw and lifted up a querulous note of remonstrance, her companion, suddenly dislodged from her cosey nest in Georgia's lap, clawed vigorously back upon the heaving folds of the summer fabric, glared around in excited search for the possible cause of such seismatic disturbance, and instantly set back a pair of tiny ears, arched a furry back, bristled her stiffening tail, and gave vent to spiteful challenge at the fell disturber of her peace. There stood a man.

A tall young fellow, erect and powerful in build, clad in civilian garb, but striding across the lawn with the swing of a trooper, halted suddenly not ten feet away and lifted from his shapely head a hat banded heavily with crape. The next instant he had hurled this aside, stepped quickly forward, utterly ignoring pussy's hostile guise, had thrown himself on one knee beside the hammock, and the drooping moustache almost swept the soft, white hands as he impetuously seized them.

"Georgia," he whispered.

Heavens! what a start! In her wild consternation she recoiled from his touch, striving at the same instant to sit erect. Hammocks are not made for combinations so eccentric. The next instant the flimsy thing had slipped from under her, and she felt herself going. Drowning men catch at straws; drowning women seize the hand they would have shunned. But for his sudden spring, but for prompt clasping arms, she would have gone headlong to the ground on the opposite side. For a minute she was held in close embrace, a confused mingling of dusky braids, of throbbing femininity, of hotly-blushing, tear-wet face, of cool linen lawn and clinging hammock-netting. Then her hands regained their cunning, and found his broad shoulders, and she pushed herself free, and then hysterical laughter came to her aid, and the shaded grove rang to a peal that, if not merry, was at least irresistible, and at last, as she sat there, restored to equilibrium and striving to regain her whirling senses, as he stood patiently bending over her, half praying that the inspired hammock might yet attempt some new freak, she glanced up at him through smiles and tears and disordered bangs, only to say,—

"How utterly absurd!"

To which philosophical remark he vouchsafed no reply whatever.

It is a full minute before she recovers, even partially, either breath or self-possession. Then she holds forth her hand, and he assists her to rise.

"This is not the welcome I should give you. Shall we go to the house?"

But even as she asks and her eyes glance nervously, shyly, up into his face, she knows he will accept no invitation that will peril this *tête-à-tête*. She sees how the lines have deepened in his frank, soldierly face, and that a sadness not all of his recent bereavement has left its traces there. She would lead him from the shaded grove to the parlor, where the lamps are already beginning to twinkle, but he will not budge one step. He stands confronting her.

"No! I have come solely to see you. Is there any reason why we cannot stay here a moment?" And she can think of none. Oh, what infamous fate that he should have found her weeping,—bathed in tears!

"I hardly thought to see you at all, especially after—the great—sorrow of your father's death," she falters, her heart leaping and bounding, despite her effort to be calm.

"I am taking mother North," he answers, simply. "It was a cruel blow to her and a hard one to me. It was all over before I could get home. Mother will spend the summer with her sister on the St. Lawrence, but she has to rest in Cincinnati until to-morrow night. I left her with old friends this afternoon and came out here to find you. I must go back this evening. And, now, have you no word of welcome for me? Did you not know that I would come, loving you as I do?"

What answer can she make? Her head is drooping low; her hands are clasped together, her bosom heaving, her breath fluttering away; and yet how wild a joy, how exquisite a hope, is throbbing in her heart of hearts!

"Georgia," he speaks impulsively, his deep voice trembling, "you made me accept your answer then and bear my bitter disappointment without a word; but I have borne it too long now. Had you been at the other end of the world I must have followed you, for the longing to see your dear face, to hear your voice, to look into your glorious eyes, has overmastered me time and again. I had to come, and now I will hear what it is that stands between us. God knows my love and honor have been yours a long, long year. God knows there can be no content or joy for me if your answer be final. You have bound my life in yours. You won my whole heart, my deepest gratitude. No, you cannot check me by impatient gesture now: you must hear. You told me there was no other man. Is that true?"

"Perfectly," she answers, proudly.

"And yet you would not listen to me. You would not be my wife."

"You forget, it was just after the trial. You seemed to think you owed me such a world of gratitude; and—do not men sometimes mistake gratitude for love?"

"Oh, heaven!" he interrupts her impetuously, his hands outstretched. "You do not mean you doubted me, Georgia? If that were your reason, is it not banished now? Look—look up into my eyes, my darling, and tell me, if you dare, that it is gratitude, not deep and fervent love, I offer you. Nay, you shall see." And, before she can retreat, his strong, trembling hands have seized her drooping

head, and between them her face, with its dark, lustrous, swimming eyes, with cheeks still tear-wet, yet burning with blushes chasing each other to her very brows, her soft red lips quivering and trembling at the dimpled corners,—all—all now lifted to his worshipping gaze; and she can repel no longer. One swift glance, and, if ever vestige of doubt remained, it vanished then and there. No woman on earth could have looked into his eyes and denied the love that burned within them, —all her own, all her own.

"Speak to me, Georgia. Do you believe me now?"

"Yes," she whispers, and her face would have hidden itself but for those strong hands again.

"And you have no love to give in return?"

A little silvery beam is peeping through the foliage now. The kittens, forgotten, are rolling over each other in mad frolic at their very feet. The last chirp of drowsing bird has died away. The silence of the sweet summer night has fallen on all surrounding nature, yet he can hardly hear her whisper,—

"You never asked it—until now."

"But it *is* mine, really? Georgia, tell me," he implores.

"It has been—all yours ever since the night I heard your letter,—ever since you wrote that you would follow the old flag to the end."

THE END.

UNCROWNED.

INSCRIBED TO THE MEMORY OF FITZJAMES O'BRIEN.

JANUARY 23, 1887.

[FitzJames O'Brien was the leader of the Bohemian circle in New York in the years immediately preceding the war. He was hurt to death in a skirmish fighting for his adopted country. In his volume "The Diamond Lens and other Tales" (Harpers) is given his story of "The Lost Room." In that story O'Brien claims descent from a chief to whom St. Kieran had prophesied, according to the "Annals of the Four Masters," that he and his descendants should rule over the Ithian race forever.]

WHILE the round sun forgets its noonday glare,
And following after clouds the evening comes,
And sounds of city feet more fleetly fare
To some kind haven, in the town of homes,
I stop to look along these shabby walls,
And almost naked floor, I claim as mine.
No priceless hanging to the wainscot falls,
No marvels painted out of oil divine
Look at this sad, worn, weary face with love.
Only a rug or twain lies here or there,
And from its case peeps out a boxing-glove.
I see the long black easel's horns still wear
My colors,—black and gold. Above the bed
Dusk Cleopatra foils the folded snake
That drives across her golden thigh its head,
And the strange love-dreams in her eyes awake;
And on the other wall Lucretia, slim,
Beautiful, bare except of gauzy veil,
That cannot hide the shapely breast and limb
And those wild eyes that time should not assail.

A ruined castle by an Irish sea.
I hear sad Cleena * calling for her king:
A beggar holds a pen afar from thee;
Never for him your white-capped waves shall sing.
Under the pent rock Loki turns his face,
Avoiding as he may the serpent's slime;
Naked and chained upon a wave-washed place,
He suffers doom for his immortal crime.
The serpent's fangs perpetual venom drop;
Cold on the rugged rock he clanks his chain,
But Sigyn holds before his face the cup,
To save his temples from the dropping pain.
Forever does the serpent's venom fail,
And ever the white waves sweep over them,

* The south Irish coast.

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A SOLDIER'S SECRET.

A STORY OF

THE SIOUX WAR OF 1890.

BY

CAPT. CHARLES KING,

U. S. ARMY,

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "THE DESERTER," "DUNRAVEN RANCH," ETC.

PHILADELPHIA.

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MARCH, 1892.

A SOLDIER'S SECRET.

I.

WHEN the Indian summer haze is hovering over the bluffs along the Pawnee in these dreamy, sunshiny afternoons of late November there is a languorous spell even in soldier life, and the troopers love to loll about the wide porches of the barracks during their brief leisure moments, or while waiting the trumpet call for stables. There is scarcely a breath of air astir. The broad, fertile valley under the bluffs, forest-fringed along the stream, gives forth a faint, pungent, smoky odor, and the eye wanders across its soft undulations, its vistas of alternate glade, grove, and shadowy pool, and sees it all as through some filmy, intangible veil. The sharp outlines so characteristic of the frontier at other seasons, giving to the ridge to the northwest that razor-back guise that inspired the original explorers, Kentuckians and Missourians, to refer to the range as "Hawg Buttes," are mellowed into softer curves. There is an echo sprite abroad in the autumn skies, for the distant whistle of the trains, the puff and pant of engines miles away, the rumble of the express as it flies across the wooden truss at Big Bend far down the valley, the lowing of cattle and the tinkle of their bells at the farms beyond the reservation lines, the shout and laughter of village children scouring the stream banks for the last of the year's crop of beech- or butternut, the soft laughter of the ladies gathered in the veranda of the major's quarters, all come floating through the pulseless air to the listening ears of the sentry dawdling here along the post at the western gate, and distracting his attention from the purely military functions which he is called upon to perform. Over at the guard-house many of the men are drowsing in the afternoon sunshine. Among the stables the horses are standing at the picket-line, with drooped heads and lazily-swishing tails. The officer of the guard, knowing the colonel to be away on a late shooting-excursion and the major held at home by the demands of hospitality, has dropped into a doze while sitting bolt upright at his wooden desk. Scores of the garrison proper seem inclined to follow his example, and the tall, dark-faced, black-bearded soldier—a handsome fellow—leaning on the breast-high wall over at the east end midway between the hospital at the edge of the bluff and the junior surgeon's quarters, his chin on his arms, his cap pulled well down over his eyes, seems to have been stricken by the general somnolence. It is only the ladies who are wide awake and alert, for this is Nita Guthrie's last appearance, so to speak. She has been paying a brief visit to Dr. and Mrs. Holden, kinsfolk of hers, but is to take the East-bound train this very night. Mrs. Holden goes too, leaving her lord, the junior medical officer of the station, to the mercy of the other women, and of all the families of some thirty married officers stationed in this big garrison not one is unrepresented at Major Berrien's to-day, for Nita Guthrie has won

all hearts. But this, say those who have known her long, is an old, old story with Nita; she has been doing the same thing for years.

There is tang of suggestiveness about this statement; moreover, it is true: Miss Guthrie is not in the first bloom of youth. "Why, she must be nearly thirty," say some of the younger girls and younger matrons, who envy her none the less the freshness, the grace, the winsomeness, that hover about her mobile face; but those who are in position to know and have no reason to feel the faintest jealousy assert very positively that Nita is not more than twenty-five.

"Well, why hasn't she married?" is the instant query of Mrs. Vance, to whose benighted mind it ever appears that because a woman hasn't she cannot.

"Simply because the right man is yet to come," is Mrs. Harper's equally prompt reply. "Nita Guthrie has had more offers in six years than any woman I ever heard of."

"Then there must be something back of it all," responds Mrs. Vance, whose theories are not to be lightly shaken. "Was there some early affair?"

"My *dear* Mrs. Vance, I have no doubt I could tell you a dozen stories, all plausible, all in active circulation when last I visited St. Louis and saw her in society there, and all as near the truth, probably, as any we could invent here. Nobody knows but Nita, and she won't tell."

Now as the autumn sun, all red burnished gold, is sinking to the horizon on this final day of a charming and memorable visit, Nita Guthrie is bidding adieu with laughing, kindly cordiality to the little coterie gathered in her honor. To one and all she has the same frank, gracious manner. Over all she throws the same odd magnetic spell, seeming to impress each and every one in turn with the same idea: "Now, you are just the most thoroughly delightful creature I have ever met, and I cannot bear to say good-by to you." There is the lingering hand-clasp, and yet not the faintest sentimentality. Nita's blue eyes—very blue—gaze straight into those of her friends. She seems to advance a step or two, as though eager to meet and take by the hand each new-comer. Even the elders among the women find it hard to go; and as for the girls, they linger spell-bound; they cluster about her, watching the sunshine in her face, the play of her features, the sparkle of her eyes, drinking in her winsome words, her rippling laughter.

"It's just the only chance we've had to ourselves, Miss Nita," protests Winifred Berrien. "You've been surrounded by men all the rest of the time, and we couldn't see you now if it weren't that they had to be in stables. Oh, if you only *didn't* have to go to-night!"

"Indeed, Winnie, I don't want to go. It seems to me nothing can be more delightful than life in an army post like this. Certainly no girl ever had a better time anywhere than you have given me here, and it is so unlike what I fancied it might be."

"It is entirely unlike what life on the frontier used to be, Miss Guthrie," answers her hostess, the major's wife, in her calm, placid way. "Any one contrasting our beatitude of to-day with our life here, there, and everywhere over the West during the Indian campaigns in which the regiment was incessantly engaged, can only wonder how we found it possible to exist in those days. Social conditions have changed, too, and in the gathering of our troops in larger garrisons a great many of the unpleasant features of the old life have been eliminated entirely. Indeed, I wish you might stay and see more of us. But you are coming again, are you not?"

"If wishing will bring it about, I shall be with you again with the coming summer or early in the spring. I have promised Mrs. Holden that I will return to her, if only for a fortnight."

The enthusiasm excited among the girls, and apparently shared by all the women present, when this announcement is made, ought certainly to convince Miss Guthrie that they most reluctantly part with her now and most pleasantly anticipate her future coming. The clamor of voices is such that for a time no one is conscious of the fact that out on the parade the regimental line has formed, and that the band is already trooping down the front. Berrien had taken his position as commanding officer. Several subalterns, whose heads were kept rigidly straight to the front, found their eyes wandering furtively over towards the major's quarters. In couples and groups, a number of the ladies come sauntering forth, gather-

ing opposite the centre nearer the colonel's house, from which point they generally watched the closing ceremony of the day. But, still oblivious to any music but that of her voice, a dozen of their number hover about Miss Guthrie. Even gun-fire fails to distract their attention. It is not until the major himself returns, tossing off his helmet and tugging at his waist-belt, that they realize that parade is over and dinner waiting.

"Now, you *will* come back next spring?"—"You *will* write?"—"You *won't* forget to send me the photograph,—mind, cabinet size,—Miss Nita?"—"Indeed, if ever I get anywhere near St. Louis you'll be the first soul I shall come in search of."

It is a little flock of enthusiastic army girls surrounding her, maidens whose early lives had been spent wandering from river to mountain, from the Gulf to the Columbia, to whom city life was almost a revelation, and city belles, beings from another world. Winifred Berrien is the leader of the coterie, a girl whose eyes are as dark as Nita's are blue, and they are ready to brim over at this very instant.

"Here comes Captain Rolfe for you now, and we've got to let you go; but we'll all be down to see you off at train-time."

The man who enters at the moment and stands just within the heavy Navajo portière, smilingly looking upon the group and quite unconscious of the almost vengeful glances in the eyes of the young girls, is a cavalry officer about thirty-five years of age. He is a tall fellow, somewhat heavily built, yet well proportioned and athletic. His face is tanned by long exposure to the sun and wind of the wide frontier. His brown hair, close-cropped, has a suspicion of gray just silvering the temples. His eyebrows are thick and strongly marked. The eyes beneath are deep-set and fringed with heavy lashes. The moustache, sweeping from his upper lip, is of a lighter brown than his hair, but equally thick, heavy, and curling. Otherwise his face is smoothly shaved, and is one which impresses those who look upon it, even carelessly, as strong and resolute. He still wears the double-breasted coat, with shoulder-knots and *fourragère*, just as he had come off parade, though he has exchanged helmet for forage-cap, which latter head-gear at this moment is being dandled in one hand, while the fingers of the other beat rapid tattoo upon the visor. Comrades of Rolfe would tell you this is a sign that he is nervous; yet to look at him there, smiling upon the group, quite as though remarking what a pretty picture they make, no one else would be apt to think of such a thing.

"Ready in a moment, Rolfe," shouts the major from an inner room. "You ready, Berengaria?"

"I am always ready, Richard, as you well know," is Mrs. Berrien's placid response. "I think I never kept you waiting so much as a moment."

"Promptest woman in the army or out of it," booms the major from his sanctum, his jovial voice resounding through the rooms of the bright garrison home. "Never knew anything like it, Miss Guthrie. Why, do you know, even when I wasn't half proposing she never let me finish the sentence! 'Twasn't at all what I was going to ask her,—that day, at least. Meant to eventually, of course, if I ever could muster up courage, but this time I had only found grit enough to ask for her picture, and I was engaged in less than ten seconds."

Winnie Berrien rushes from the parlor into the paternal den, voluble with protestation against such scandalous stories at mamma's expense; but Mrs. Berrien, slowly fanning herself, remains calmly seated, as though impervious to these damaging shots, at which everybody else is laughing merrily.

"Possibly you don't believe me," again booms the major, his jolly red face aglow, as he is dragged forth from the den, still struggling with the sleeve-links of his cuff. "Winifred, my child, unhand me. *You'll* never bring your old father's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave by such unwomanly precipitancy, unless it's a civilian with ten thousand a year: will you, dearest?—Miss Guthrie, I never expect to be a rich man. I hadn't as many dollars when I fell in love with Miss De Lancy as I had buttons, and we only wore single-breasted coats in those days, and I was the junior captain. I pledge you my word I never would have had the cheek to offer myself. 'Twas the woman did it. I was going away for a week, and I said, 'You *can* give me one thing, if you will.' I only meant to beg for that picture, and, by Jove! she slipped her hand into mine. I was shaking all

over. 'I—b-beg pardon,' I stammered, 'I was only going to—beg for your p-p-p——' 'My promise?' said Berengaria, sweetly, looking up into my eyes. 'You have it, Richard.' Prompt? Why, she just jumped at me. Splendid arrangement, though, Miss Guthrie. She furnished the quarters and all the money, and I the vivacity and beauty of the household, until Winnie came: she contributes a little towards it now. But we're a model couple, aren't we, Berengaria?" And the major bends with playful tenderness, the fun sparkling in his eyes meanwhile, and kisses his handsome helpmeet's rosy cheek.

"We have few crosses, certainly," replies Mrs. Berrien, whose own name is anything but Berengaria, that being, as she is frequently called upon to explain, some of the major's historical nonsense. "We have few crosses, and those, of course, *I* bear. But now," she continues, with much decision of manner, "if you are partially restored to sanity we will go, or keep dinner longer waiting.—Miss Guthrie, do they allow lunatics at large in the streets of St. Louis? Major Berrien spoke of getting a month's leave this winter and going thither."

"Oh, send him by all means, and he shall be treated at our own asylum. Father would rejoice in him,—as I do, Mrs. Berrien."

"And shall I get the colonel to detail Rolfe here to conduct me thither and turn me over to the asylum authorities?" queries the major, with a knowing cock of the head. "Rolfe hates city life as a general thing, but he would accept that duty, I fancy."

"Captain Rolfe will be very welcome. Indeed, I only wish you might bring the whole regiment, major. Just think what a good time the girls could have this winter if that were only possible."

"Berengaria says," bursts in the major again, "that if I only show you proper attention on this visit you'll be sure to send us invitations to bring the whole family and spend six weeks at least."

"Father! you outrageous fibber!" gasps Winifred, rushing at him and placing one slim hand upon his mouth, while twining the other, with its soft white arm, about his neck.—"Indeed, Miss Guthrie, you must be told that father is perpetually poking fun at mother, making her say all manner of things she never thought of. It is all well enough in the regiment, where people understand it and are prepared for his nonsense, but many strangers are completely deceived at times, and mamma never so much as remonstrates."

Evidently mamma does not consider it worth while.

"It would be wasted time, Miss Guthrie, and we are wasting time as it is.—Captain Hazlett will never forgive you, Major Berrien, if you keep dinner waiting another minute.—Captain Rolfe, will you escort Miss Guthrie?—Come, Richard, march!"

"After you, Rolfe," says the major, with a bow of extra ceremony. "After you."

"Before them, if you please, you blind goose!" whispers his better half. "Haven't you sense enough to see he wants to speak with her and that this may be the only opportunity?"

"What! Rolfe wants to talk with her? Why, Miss Guthrie," he booms aloud, "I hadn't the faintest idea——" But here the wife of his bosom lays firm hand upon his sunburnt ear and fairly marches him forth upon the veranda. Miss Guthrie would indeed have been glad to lead, but Rolfe's hand, trembling slightly, as she cannot but note, is laid upon her wrist, restraining her.

"Why didn't you tell me you wanted to talk with Rolfe, Miss Guthrie?" queries the major, over his shoulder, with every appearance of concern. "I could have fixed it all for you."

"Silence, Dick!" sternly murmurs Mrs. Berrien. "There is no fun in this affair, and I warn you—not another word."

Twilight has fallen upon the garrison as they stroll across the parade. The men have vanished from the scene, but the tinkle of guitar and banjo tells where they have gathered. Most of the officers are at dinner. One or two couples are just entering the gateway of Hazlett's quarters,—guests invited to meet the fair visitor on this the last evening of her stay. Dr. and Mrs. Holden can be seen among them, Mrs. Holden gazing somewhat anxiously at Nita and her escort, for it is plain that Rolfe seeks to detain the woman to whom he has paid such unusual and devoted attention ever

since the hour of her arrival. Silence and peace have spread their wings abroad, hovering with the twilight over the broad reservation, and the Berriens, walking rapidly now as the energetic lady can lead her expostulating spouse, come suddenly upon the sight of the great golden moon rising above the distant bluffs and peering in upon the garrison through the wide space that interposes between the surgeon's quarters and the barracks at the east end.

"Now, *there* is something Miss Guthrie really must see!" says Berrien, halting short. "As one of her admirers and entertainers, I feel bound to call her attention to it."

"Dick!—stupid!—move on at once. You must not speak to her now. Can't you see?"

"See? Of course I see; and I want her to see: that's why I stop." Again half teasingly he attempts to turn, as though bent on looking back. She promptly whirls him about and faces him in the proper direction. "Oh," he persists, "if it is something about her you wanted me to see, can't you understand that I have no eyes in the back of my head, and that therefore I should be allowed to look about?"

"You see, sir, and understand the situation perfectly well as it is. You're simply bent on mischief. You know that Rolfe has been her shadow all day long, hanging about her to say his say. He knows this to be his last chance. Everybody will be there the moment dinner is over. Everybody will surround her, and unless he speaks now he must let her go without a word."

"Berengaria, you amaze me! Are you conniving at his capture? Didn't you tell me you knew she wouldn't have him?"

"I did; I know it now; but he is a man who wants to hear his fate from her own lips and plead his cause, too, like a man, unless I am very much mistaken in him. No, sir, don't you dare look back."

"Poor devil! Why couldn't he wait till after dinner? she might be in softer mood then. I always am. That's why you always wait till after dinner, I presume, when you have anything special to ask. Now, this will take his appetite away entirely."

"As if he had any in the first place! Positively, Richard, you have no soul above a dinner. When a man is as desperately in love as Rolfe, do you suppose he cares much what he eats?"

"Well, seems to me I was never off my feed," is Berrien's reply, with preternatural gravity, looking straight to the front now and refusing to meet his wife's dark eyes.

"You!" with fine scorn. "You! Why, Richard Berrien, with all your amiable qualities of heart and weaknesses of head, no one on earth would ever associate you and sentiment in the same breath. Of course you and your appetite are inseparable; but Rolfe is different: he is a lover."

"Well, what am I?"

"You are simply a goose to-night. Come, don't stop at the gate now; push right on into the house after the Holdens. I'll run up to Mrs. Hazlett's room with Nita."

A dozen of the fort people, only, have been bidden to dinner, for hardly a dining-room at the post is big enough for more, and on the porch, anxiously awaiting the coming of his guests, is Hazlett.

"Where are Rolfe and Miss Guthrie?" asks he, as men will ask. "All here now but them."

"Coming at once; only a few steps behind us," promptly answers Mrs. Berrien. "Run in, major: I'll wait for Nita." Berrien looks as though he meditated a mischievous remark, but something in her voice and manner tells him that instant obedience is expected. He gives one quick glance and steps into the hall.

Presently, while chatting with others of the arriving party, he is conscious of the swish of skirts passing up the stairway. The door to the veranda is still open, and, glancing out, Berrien can see Rolfe alone, leaning against one of the wooden pillars, his head drooping as though plunged in deep thought.

"Poor old chap! he's got his *congé* to-night, and that's the end of his two years' romance. Odd about that girl. She fancies nobody."

Three hours later, the moon being well up in the heavens now, and the whole parade shining revealed almost as bright as day, both the verandas

and the parlor of Hazlett's cosey home are thronged with officers and ladies, chatting merrily together. The lights are still blazing in the barracks. The trumpeters in full force are grouped about the flag-staff, sounding the last notes of tattoo. The Holdens have borne Miss Guthrie away with them that the ladies might stow their evening gowns in the waiting Saratogas and then don their travelling garb while the quartermaster's big wagon trundles the luggage down to the railway-station. Presently this lumbering vehicle can be seen slowly rolling away from the Holdens' gate, and everybody at Hazlett's waits impatiently for the return of the party. Mrs. Holden is deservedly a favorite in the garrison, and Nita Guthrie, as has been said, has won golden opinions. The evening air is growing chill, however, and of the dozen ladies present only the younger, the girls, remain longer upon the veranda. About this pretty group, laughing and chatting, are four or five of the younger officers, Brewster, "the swell of the subs," keeping close to Winifred Berrien, and claiming more and more of the glances of her big dark eyes. Down at the gate, the moonlight glinting on his polished sabre, the officer of the day is exchanging a few low-toned words with Majór Berrien. Rolfe, who, with silent and dogged resolution, had taken his place at Miss Guthrie's side as she came down the stairs and escorted her to the doctor's, has turned from there and gone slowly across the parade to his own quarters on the other side. Everybody seems to see and know what has happened, and many half-whispered comments are being made, not all in sympathy with the willowed lover. Everybody respects Rolfe, yet among the younger officers are several who feel no warmth of friendship for him, and, as between man and man, garrison girls can only side with the youngsters. Their story of their slight differences is sometimes told again and again ; the elders' seldom, for theirs would hardly be believed.

Little by little the chat and laughter subside.

"Oh, why doesn't she come back?" pouts Miss Berrien. "The ambulances will be here in less than half an hour, and we won't see anything of her." A chorus of girlish voices echoes Winifred's views. Mrs. Berrien and Mrs. Parker at this moment come forth from the house and look expectantly up the road.

"How long they are!" says Winnie again. "What can keep them, mamma?"

"Packing, I doubt not, my child."

"But the wagon's gone, trunks and all. It can't be that."

"Still, I would not fret about it, Winnie. Has she not promised to come next spring and pay us a long visit?"

"Yes, but who knows where we may all be next spring, or what may happen meantime? Every paper we get is full of stories of the ghost-dances among the Sioux ; and if there *should* be another Indian war——"

"Nonsense, Winifred! Don't think of such a thing! After all this regiment has had to suffer in Indian battle, you don't suppose we, of all others, would be sent from here to a winter campaign in the Northern Department? We've seen the last of such troubles, God be thanked!"

Major Berrien, his interview with the officer of the day ended, has just started to rejoin the group on the veranda, when he hears his wife's pious words. He whirls around sharply.

"Oh, captain, there's one thing I forgot to tell you." And the sabre of the officer of the day clanks against his leg as Captain Porter faces about. The younger officers go on with their blithe chat; but Mrs. Berrien has known her lord twenty long years, and no sooner has the officer of the day departed than she hastens to join him.

"Dick," she falters, "surely you do not believe that there is any chance of the Twelfth going, even if there should be trouble? Dick, tell me."

"Berengaria, beloved inquisitor," he begins, "I didn't even know there was a row anywhere."

But she rebukes him by a single glance.

"Tell me, Dick," she persists, and clings to his arm. "You don't think, after all we've been through, that, now that we are so happily settled here, there is a possibility of such a thing? It isn't only for myself now. It's—it would mean more to Winifred than either of us dreams of."

He looks at her in silence and amaze. Then—then comes sudden distraction. On the stillness of the night there rises a scream of terror,—a

woman's voice uplifted in the expression of an awful shock and agony. Then a dash towards Holden's quarters, every man joining.

"My God!" shouts Berrien, "it's Nita Guthrie."

Following the rush of soldiers' feet, half a dozen ladies, too, have hastened, Winifred Berrien foremost of the lot. At the head of the stairs on the landing of the second floor, dressed for her journey, lies the fair guest of the regiment, a senseless heap, with the blood flowing from underneath her pallid face.

II.

Indian summer was over and done with. The soft haze had gone. For three days the wind had been blowing hard from the northwest, and the air was as clear as an Arizona sky, the distant outlines sharp as the tooth of the prairie blast. Colonel Farquhar had suddenly broken off his shooting-trip, and, without saying why, returned to the post. Captain Rolfe had "cut" the club, once a favorite resort, and was much in Dr. Holden's company,—Holden, who was lonely enough, now that his wife and little ones were gone. Throughout the garrison there was one leading topic for conversation and conjecture,—Miss Guthrie's strange adventure the night of her intended departure, and her equally strange conduct thereafter. She had remained senseless but a few moments. Gentle hands had raised and borne her to the bed in the room she was evidently just about entering when suddenly halted by some mysterious cause. Here, when restored to consciousness, an almost hysterical attack of laughing and weeping had followed upon her prostration. She insisted on attempting to rise and go to the train as originally planned, but this Holden positively forbade. He had succeeded in stanching the flow of the blood from a jagged cut near the temple, and could suggest ready theory as to the cause thereof,—in falling she had probably struck the edge of the little wooden post at the top of the balusters,—but beyond this explanation there was absolutely nothing. Nita Guthrie would only account for her sudden terror by the half-nervous, half-laughing statement that she thought she saw a ghost, had played the coward, and turned to run.

But to the trained physician it was evident she had received a severe shock. Despite her pleadings, Dr. Holden had refused to allow her to attempt the journey until three days had elapsed, during which time, though she laughed at him and laughed at herself, her condition continued so nervous and excitable that he would not permit visitors to see her. This was pretty hard treatment, thought her many lady friends at the post, but he was wise and they could only obey. When the evening came for the departure, a large contingent, ladies and officers both, assembled to say farewell, and Nita, Mrs. Holden, each of the children, and even the nurse, could have had two or three escorts to the train. But no one had opportunity to say much to the central figure of all this sympathetic interest. Only at the last moment did she appear, and was ushered almost instantly to the waiting carriage by Holden, who had only summoned her when vigilant eyes had reported the head-light of the express visible far up the valley. But then down at the dark platform of the station faithful, sad-faced Rolfe was waiting, and in the minute or two that intervened before the huge train came glaring, hissing, and thundering alongside he managed to have a word or two with her. Mrs. Vance, had she been present, might have vowed that Nita shrank and clung to Holden's arm, but others who were there saw her extend her gloved hand cordially, saw that Rolfe clung to it an instant,—charitable others who could only wave adieu, for the party was hurried aboard, and away went the express, the tail-lights of the rear sleeper disappearing in the dripping gloom around the bend, for, as though in sympathy with the mourning of the post, a drizzling rain had begun to fall just after retreat. Rolfe, gazing after them to the last, wore that look seen on the face of many another man many another time. There can be few sensations more dismal than that of watching the disappearing lights of the train that bears away one's best beloved, especially in the eyes of him who stands rejected.

"Let me drive you home, Rolfe," said Holden, kindly. "Two of a

kind," was his mental addition. And Rolfe turned slowly away, neither man saying another word until once more they stood at the gate of the now deserted home.

"Come in and have a pipe."

"Thanks, not—now, doctor." A long, wistful pause, then—"Well, good-night."

"Good-night, old man. Come when you will; I'll be lonely now." And the doctor stood and gazed after him long and earnestly as the captain strode into the darkness out over the parade.

Within the days that followed, when he had leisure to think it all over, Holden felt his perplexities increase. Up to the very last Nita had persisted in her statement that nothing had happened to warrant the absurd exhibition she had made of herself. "I was overwrought, nervous, unstrung," she said. "I had not been feeling quite well. I had run up to the room for my gloves, which I had left upon the table. I had not reached the door, and it was just the waving of those white curtains in the draught from the side window. I must have thought I saw a ghost, and, like a fool, I screamed and tripped, and—*voilà tout.*"

But Holden had known her for six years, and felt well assured she was not of the stuff that is easily stricken with terror. With every confidence in her veracity in general, he did not in the least believe her now. The more he studied the matter the more he felt that she was hiding something from them one and all, even from Jennie, whom she dearly loved and whom ordinarily she frankly trusted. It was evident that Jennie, too, believed, as did her husband, the doctor, that there was something behind it all. But Jennie was gone, and, except possibly Rolfe, there was no one to aid him in his search after the truth. Rolfe's heart was now so shrouded in its own gloom that any phase of tragedy seemed credible. Rolfe evidently wanted to know Holden's suspicions or surmises, and again and again led up to the subject; but of all men in the garrison, much as he esteemed him, Rolfe seemed hardly the man to make a confidant of now. Was he not Nita's avowed though rejected lover?

Of course no time had been lost in making investigation on the night of the occurrence. Even while the doctor and others were raising the unconscious girl from the floor, half a dozen officers were scouring the premises for signs of intruder, and had found absolutely nothing. The room occupied by Miss Guthrie in the doctor's house was immediately to the left at the head of the stairs. The hall was broad, the landing roomy. It was one of the oldest sets of quarters at the post, and an oddity in its way. Entering the door of the rear room on the east, three windows appeared, two opening at the back and one at the side. The two at the back looked out over the roof of the rear porch. It was perfectly practicable for any one with a ladder to have clambered to this roof, and, had the blinds been open, peered in the windows at the occupant. But there was no ladder. What was more, the blinds were tight shut and bolted on the inside. The shades within were drawn down, and the lace curtains looped over each. Between them stood a long old-fashioned mirror above the toilet-table, draped with lace curtains very much as were the windows themselves. No one from without could have been visible to any one within. No one within could have been seen by any one without. Moreover, the Holdens' cook—an indomitable Irishwoman—was on the back porch at the moment of Miss Guthrie's fright, saying good-night to Corporal Murphy, who had long been Kathleen's devoted admirer, and both stood ready to swear that nobody was on that roof. The rear windows thus disposed of, the doctor had turned his attention to the window at the side, and here there was possibility of explanation.

As has been said, the Holdens' house was one of the oldest at the old frontier fort, but so solidly and substantially had it been built that, when others were condemned and ordered replaced along the row, the authorities had decided to retain "Bayard Hall." It was originally a double set, with hall-way in common, intended for the use of four bachelor officers, each to have his two rooms, there being four rooms on the first and four on the second floor, while the kitchen and servants' rooms were placed in a wooden addition at the rear. The ground fell away rapidly from the front piazza, so that while the first-floor front was but a few steps higher than the walk, the rear porch was a full story above the ground, giving abundant space for

store-rooms, etc., under that part of the house, and necessitating a flight of a dozen steps to reach the porch or the kitchen door-way. Around the front and sides of the second story there ran originally a broad gallery, but this was before the days of the war of the rebellion, during which the post was little used, and when, after certain repairs and alterations, the house was declared assignable as family quarters, the old wooden gallery had been condemned and torn down. Nevertheless, the beams which were its support on the east were found solid and firm. They projected through the wall of rough-hewn stone, and an old-time quartermaster, selecting the house for his own use, had thrown a light gallery out upon them. It made such a convenient place for flower-pots, shrubs, bath-tubs, and things of that description, said he. Furthermore, it was a place where he could go in the warm evenings and smoke and sip his toddy with his chosen associates, and not have every garrison gabbler crowding in to disturb their chat and absorb his precious Monongahela. The gallery had no roof, was only five feet wide, and was inaccessible except through this one window, which the unsociable major had had cut down level with the floor. "Robbers' Roost" the disdainful subalterns used to call it in the days when bluff old Blitz had occupied the quarters and barred out all but his chums, and by the same name was it known when Holden moved in with his wife and olive-branches and took up his abode there a few years before the opening of this story. When the Eleventh marched out and the Twelfth came in, Colonel Farquhar, finding the doctor in possession, decided that the Holdens should not be disturbed,—that there was abundant room for others in the new quarters. The Holdens entertained a great deal. Pleasant people were visiting them month after month, and everybody in the Twelfth blessed them for the brightness and gayety their presence lent to the garrison. A sterling fellow was Holden, one of the best men in one of the very best corps, personally and professionally, in our little army ; and as for his wife, an accomplished society woman, a St. Louis belle, still in the heyday of youthful womanhood, everybody in the garrison delighted in her friendship and kindliness. There was no more popular parlor than Holdens', and night after night the young officers gathered there. But "Robbers' Roost" had fallen into disuse. The glass door was generally shut, and the venetian blinds with which old Blitz had decorated it were ordinarily closed except when this, one of their two guest-chambers, was occupied. Shades and lace curtains similar to those at the rear windows draped it within, so that from the interior this side door presented almost the same appearance as the windows themselves, and it stood directly opposite the hall door. But Miss Guthrie had become enthusiastic over the lovely view down the Pawnee Valley from that side gallery. She was frequently to be seen there. She had gone out for one farewell look as the valley lay flooded in the light of the full moon, and this was immediately after changing her dress. She was exclaiming over its beauty as, arrayed for her journey, she came dancing down the stairs to join her hostess and the excited children in the parlor. She suddenly missed her gloves, remembered that she had left them in her room, had scurried up the stairs, had reached the landing at the top, but never entered her room at all, when there was heard that awful shriek of terror and a heavy fall. Holden at the instant was in his own room, the rear room on the opposite side of the house, and was changing his best uniform into something more suitable for a run down to the railway. This had delayed him a second or two, so that Brewster and Randolph, two of the most active of the junior officers, were foremost at his heels as he flew up the stairs. His first care was for Nita, but the youngsters had bounded into the room and out on the gallery, as though expecting to overtake some intruder there. The side door was wide open, the shade up, the lace curtains drawn apart. If any one had been in the room, escape to the gallery was easy enough, but from there there was practically none except by a leap of fifteen or twenty feet to the hard ground below. No one had run out, either front or back, for Murphy and the Irish cook were at the rear on the east side, the rushing swarm of officers at the front. If any one had hidden there, escape unobserved was well-nigh impossible. No one was found, —no trace of any one. Indeed, when Nita was permitted to talk she vowed that no one had been there. She herself had left the blinds, door, and curtains open as she came in from the moonlit gallery, had turned out her lamp and descended the stairs. The gallery door-way could not be seen

from where she fell, and, as all was darkness in the room itself, how could she have seen any one?

Out on the gallery, of course, any one would have been revealed, thanks to the brilliancy of the full moon, almost as in the broad glare of day; but one had to be at the hall door or in the square room itself in order to see the gallery at all, and Nita declared, as before, that she had not reached the door. What she fancied was a ghost, bathed in a pale, cold light, was probably the white curtains of the rear windows. But the light,—whence came that?

The possibility of any one having been in the room was not entertained. Prompt and thorough search had been made in every nook and corner of the upper story. The rooms of the nurse and children were on the westward side of the hall, and the nurse was in one of them, putting on her hat, at the very moment. The front room on the east was unoccupied. Nita had chosen the other because of that gallery and its lovely view. Then there was the rear slope of the main roof above the gallery. That, thought Holden, might have offered a way of escape, because it was out of sight from the parade. But Brewster and Randolph had both essayed to reach the eaves, and, even when standing on the railing, could barely touch them with the tips of their fingers. Then, again, a sentry walked along the edge of the slope leading to the river-bottom south of the long row of officers' quarters and close behind the rear fence, but he was at the eventful moment well down the row beyond Hazlett's house, whereas Dr. Holden's was at the eastern end of the line. The moon shone full against the back fence, said the sentry, and he was sure he would have seen anybody who ran out of the gate of the doctor's yard, and the first who appeared were the searching officers, Corporal Murphy with them. Several men had then come running from the direction of the laundresses' quarters to the west, and after them Sergeant Ellis. Indeed, it was Ellis who first suggested a search of the roof by means of a ladder. He was sergeant in charge of the fire-apparatus kept in that long, low building at the east end, and had the keys of the door. It was by his aid that some of the junior officers made a thorough examination of the roof and the front porch. No more signs there than had hitherto been found. No, the sentry on the south post was confident that no man came out of Holden's yard until he got to the gate, whither he had run the instant he heard the cry. He thought it might be a lamp-explosion or a fire, and he was watching with eager eyes. He had been on post nearly two hours when the alarm came, and, except Corporal Murphy and the quartermaster's men who took the trunks, he had not seen or heard a man about the premises. Kathleen, the nurse-maid, and the children had been home all the evening, and they had neither seen nor heard anybody.

Captain Rolfe, unable to sleep, and making the rounds on his own account about one o'clock, found the sentry of the third relief gazing curiously in at the open back gate, and questioned him as to what excited his attention.

"Nothing, sir," was the prompt reply of the trooper, as he threw his carbine to the position of "arms port." "I was simply wondering how any man could have ventured in there this bright night and expected to get out unseen, especially early in the evening, when men are passing to and fro all the time."

"What made you think any one had been there?" asked the captain, quietly.

"Everybody has heard by this time that there was a search made, and that the young lady had seen something to frighten her. Besides, Sergeant Ellis spoke of it to me an hour ago."

"What was the sergeant doing on your post at midnight?"

"Why, sir, the captain remembers Sergeant Ellis is in charge of the fire-house and sleeps there. He came out a little before twelve and said he'd lost his pet pipe while he was hunting around with Lieutenant Brewster after he brought the ladder, and I let him pass in, sir. He said he'd been working there long after taps, and it would be all right. He found the pipe, sir, right at the edge of the wood-pile yonder. He showed it to me as he came out."

Captain Rolfe was silent a moment. Ordinarily none of the enlisted men had any right to be away from quarters after the "lights out" signal, but this case was unusual. Furthermore, Ellis was a man superior in intelli-

gence, a sergeant of more than a year's standing, and one who had been selected for this especial duty for the very reason that, holding himself much aloof from the average run of the rank and file, he would be apt to attend strictly to his duties as custodian of the fire-house, and no one had ever heard of his abusing his trust. His own little room was a model of neatness when the commanding officer made his monthly inspection of the garrison, and the hose-carriage, the hook-and-ladder truck, the fire-buckets, and other apparatus were always in perfect order and readiness for service. No one ever inspected Ellis's quarters at any other time. The guard often noticed his light after midnight, and he had the reputation of being a good deal of a reader and student, taking books from the post library very often, besides owning quite a number of his own. Observant officers who had glanced about when making the inspection with Colonel Farquhar noted that many of these were texts on mining, mining engineering, mineralogy, and geology, and some had gone so far as to question the sergeant as to whether he had ever practically essayed mining. With perfectly respectful manner Ellis replied to these occasional queries, merely saying, "Yes, sir, but without success." Asked where he had made his essay, his reply was rather vague: "In several Western States and Territories, sir,—mainly Arizona and Colorado." Only once had he displayed anything like annoyance or impatience under such fire. He had served his three years' enlistment, was entitled to his discharge, yet quietly notified his troop commander that he proposed to re-enlist. In a somewhat sharp manner that official had whirled about.

"Sergeant Ellis," said he, "if I had had your experience in mining it seems to me I'd find something different from staying in the regular army."

"Captain Gorham," was the unexpected reply, "if you had had anything like my experience you would be very glad of a berth in the army or out of it,—preferably in."

It was conceded after this episode that Ellis had a history and the faculty of keeping it to himself. The colonel was glad to have him re-enlist, even while wondering that he should do so. Many remembered how he had come to them haggard and travel-worn three years before and offered himself as a recruit. This was far out in the mountains. His language and manners were such that every one knew it to be a case of a man whom fortune had betrayed, and who "took the shilling," as many another has done, somewhat as a last resort. But before he had won his first chevrons the men knew well that from some source or other Ellis was beginning to receive a good deal of money. When Sergeant Currie was killed by that tough in the public streets of Sheridan City,—a cold-blooded and unprovoked murder,—and Currie's wife and children had not where to lay their heads now that their support was gone, officers and men "chipped in" and bought them a little cottage on the banks of Rapid Run, just at the edge of town. Ellis had planked down a five-dollar bill as his share on the subscription-list, but did not Kate Currie, the eldest child, tell how he had come all by himself afterwards and given her an envelope which he bade her hand to mother from a friend,—an envelope which was found to hold a fifty-dollar Treasury note? Sporting characters in the regiment who sought to borrow from Ellis met with cold, even curt, refusal. Neither would he ever gamble or bet with them. Neither did he seem to care to go to town at all when first the regiment moved into this its most delightful station after years of service on the distant frontier,—not until the order was issued permitting meritorious soldiers to wear civilian dress when on pass. Then he was almost the first to appear on the streets of the bustling county seat, in a neat, unobtrusive, but remarkably well cut and well fitting suit, and, far better dressed than most of the townspeople, Sergeant Ellis became an occasional visitor; but no one ever heard of his patronizing any other establishments than the bank, the post- and express-offices, and the book-stores. Captain Hazlett, calling at the post-office one day, was surprised to find Ellis at a lock-box, the key of which he calmly placed in his waistcoat-pocket and then as calmly raised his hat in salutation to his superior officer. Both were in civilian dress, both on temporary leave of a few hours only, both, from the point of view of the correspondent of a very enterprising paper, occupied at the moment the same social plane, and his allusions to "the slavish deference demanded by the aristocratic commissioned force of their enlisted but far worthier men" gave rise to some discussion at the fort. One or two

officers held that Ellis should have given the military salute and no other, but the mass of opinion was in favor of Ellis's action: being entirely in civilian dress himself, the civilian custom should prevail.

"Well, damn it," said Mr. Randolph, "that consists out here in shoving one's hands deeper into pockets, tilting the cigar higher in the mouth, and giving just half a nod." It was finally conceded, however, that in courteously raising his hat Sergeant Ellis had done about the right thing, and that in as punctiliously raising his own in recognition the captain had fittingly and scrupulously acknowledged the courtesy, the sneers and lashings of *The Spasm City Chimes* to the contrary notwithstanding.

Still, no one supposed that Ellis was going to re-enlist when his time expired. They had already begun casting about for somebody else to place in charge of the fire-house. But Ellis signed the papers with ready hand, asked for and got a month's furlough with permission to leave the department, and was back in two weeks ready to resume duty, his dark face a trifle paler, his heavy beard becomingly trimmed, just three days after Nita Guthrie's arrival, just three days before she was to have gone home.

Rolfe turned from the sentry and gazed away eastward. How many a long mile down that beautiful valley were the lights of the rushing train by this time, and what meant this light so close at hand, shining faintly but clearly through the slowly-plashing rain? After one, and the sergeant still up and reading? No, it burned too dimly for a student-lamp; neither was it in the sergeant's room. Following his thoughts, Rolfe, wrapped in his mackintosh, moved slowly out to the eastern edge of the bold bluff, passing the fire-house on his way. A breast-high wall of rough stone ran diagonally over towards what was left of the old block-house, once perched on the brow of the cliff, and, as the captain reached the point of the bluff, he became aware of a dim figure standing silent and motionless between him and the southern face of the antiquated work. Another man whose thoughts were following the eastward windings of that misty valley, was it not? Another keeping sleepless vigil?

"Who's that?" in low tone, he suddenly hailed. A start, a quick turn, then prompt advance and answer:

"Sergeant Ellis, sir."

The deep collar of his overcoat was turned up about his ears, so that the face was well-nigh hidden, but the voice was calm and firm.

"You keep late hours, sergeant."

"Not without warrant, captain."

"Your warrant might suffer, sir, if the colonel knew you had lights at two o'clock."

"It is by his authority, sir, that one lantern burns all night; that is the one the captain sees."

Rolfe paused, baffled.

"Then I believe I will light a cigar at your lantern," he finally said, and, turning, he moved away towards the low wooden building behind him. Ellis promptly followed, then sprang ahead and opened the door for his superior's entrance.

"Let me offer the captain a match: that is an oil lantern." And, striking a lucifer on the strip of sandpaper, he held it forth. Rolfe missed the flame with the end of his weed. Light came to him, but not to his cigar. Muffled though his face remained in the depths of that cavalry collar, Sergeant Ellis's lips and chin were visible through the opening in the front and in the glare of the little match.

"When did you shave off your beard, sergeant? I should hardly have known you."

The lips trembled, but the dark eyes, the deep voice, were steady as ever:

"Last evening, sir."

III.

The northwest winds that had finally banked up the southern clouds and squeezed down a dismal drizzle the night of Miss Guthrie's departure now veered and whisked away the moist and plashing veil, and the afternoon sunshine of the day that followed streamed across the broad *mesa* in a flood

of grateful warmth and radiance. The colonel ordered out the entire command, to the utter consternation of Miss Winifred Berrien and the supreme disgust of some half a dozen junior officers, who, counting on the weather indications at nine A.M., had eagerly accepted Mrs. Berrien's suggestion that they spend their rainy afternoon at the major's hospitable quarters, by way of making it pleasant for two young damsels from town and three or four from the fort itself, all of whom were supposed to be deeply interested and engaged in the embroidery of certain altar-cloths, lecturn and pulpit adornments, with which to rejoice the eyes of their amiable chaplain at Christmas-tide. Here it was well along in November, and, beyond a vast amount of chatter and conjecture over the prospective pleasure of the reverend dominie, nothing had been done.

True, the colonel had astonished everybody by ordering out the entire regiment, at least the eight companies thereof present at the post, to parade for inspection and review, equipped for field-service, at nine-thirty that morning, and only reluctantly recalled the order when the persistent plashing of the rain warned him that it would take a day or two of sunshine to dry out the clothing and equipments subjected to such a downpour. And then if anything should happen and they should be suddenly called upon to bundle everything right into the waiting train—— But, pshaw! the thing wasn't possible: the idea could not be entertained. Of course matters were looking squally, very squally, up there in the Dakotas, and everybody from the Missouri to the mountains and north of the Platte was already out in the field, and, in little detachments from the scattered posts even far away in Montana, even far in southern Wyoming, the soldiery were converging towards those swarming agencies where thousands of truculent warriors of the great Dakota nation were drawing rations for every man, woman, child, and pappoose they possessed. Be it known to the reader that paternalism is rampant in the land,—that while peace societies and Indian rights associations and prayerful congregations away at the Atlantic seaboard are deluging the press with diatribes upon the wrongs of the red man and the criminal neglect of the nation, and declaring that

> Man's inhumanity to Lo
> Makes countless Indians mourn,

in this last "century of dishonor" Uncle Sam has disbursed millions upon millions in the desperately hopeless task of filling the aboriginal stomach, and in striving by means of honest census to reduce the number of the "countless" so pathetically referred to. Indians would make splendid ward politicians, and how it is that the sachems of Tammany have not long since possessed themselves of so available a means of swelling their ranks passeth all understanding. After the Indian had had himself, several wives, and his blooming olive-branches, "oksheelah, wicincha," boys and girls, and such pappooses as his better halves had at the back (either of home production or borrowed for the moment from the tepee of Two-Bricks-in-his-Hat), duly enumerated, would he not swell the census of his tribe by judicious distribution of all his wives' relations among those tepees not already checked off? Oh, if the truth could ever reach the ears of the general public, what tales of Indian sagacity might not yet be in store for them! What annals might not be unfolded! Dealing with his own, his white children, who are non-voters, Uncle Sam serves out one ration a day to each enlisted soldier. The wife, and the lads and lasses that tumbled about the married men's quarters in the queer old days, were all to be fed from that one ration, unless, perchance, mamma was a laundress. But when dealing with the wronged and injured red man he could not be too magnanimous. Every head counted. The mumbling old beldam, great-grandmother of "countless thousands," braced up from the edge of the grave for the occasion. The big-bellied little four-year-olds, revelling in the dirt about the reeking shambles, the tiny, hour-old pappoose, even many a puppy, blanket-swathed and slung squaw-back, passing for a wee baby,—anything he could show as possessing a spark of Indian life was duly credited to the warrior lord of the lodge for another ration,—a full one. Cattle might and did shrink, but to the Indian there is more meat in a lean cow than in the stall-fed ox to the white, for the reason that "everything goes." Horns and hoofs are the only things the Indian doesn't eat. Agents might and did

cheat and steal, but so did the Indian, and many a rejoicing old sinner has been credited with a family of twelve when his sole available domestic assets consisted of two squaws and three children, the pappooses having been borrowed, or personated by bundled-up doggies, the grandmother being public property, passed around for the occasion; the others, pickaninnies painted so as to look entirely unlike the grinning urchins counted in the flock of brother Stab-in-the-Dark whose people had just been enumerated. There were agents who lent themselves to that sort of thing because the more Indians they could show as their especial wards, the more barrels and boxes and bales were invoiced to that agency and deftly "raked off" *en route.* There was a time when the man who wouldn't make hay when such a sun shone was looked upon as an unprofitable servant who couldn't contribute to campaign funds. "What the devil do you suppose we had you made agent 'way up at Gallatin for?" asked an irate political "boss" of a deposed and crestfallen late-incumbent who came home superseded.

"Why, it was you and our Congressman who exposed the stealings of my predecessor and had him fired. I supposed you wouldn't stand that sort of thing. I supposed you wanted me to be perfectly honest."

"Of course we did; but, damn it, you don't seem to understand: he was paying to the other party."

But railways and telegraphs have brought all this, or much of it, within range, so to speak. Things are changed, except perhaps human nature, white or Indian. There has been failure to provide for carrying out the earnest recommendations of the best friend the Indian has known for years,—the man whose word was his bond, whom they feared in war and loved and trusted in peace. There has been shrinkage both in the cattle and the count. No matter how much beef might shrivel on the hoof in the old days, the Sioux, if he were at all sharp, got more than was his share; and most of the Sioux were sharp as their knives. Other tribes might have starved and suffered, but not they. With the new order of things came full stomachs for hosts of other aborigines, but fault-finding for these Dakotas. No more "tepee counts;" on the contrary, heads of families paraded their entire force, and, while enumerators with book and pencil went along the front of the line, Uncle Sam's blue-coats on the border keenly watched the rear, and put sudden stop to all sham or swapping. Now the shrinkage came to be privation, and, turning in appeal to the general who headed the great commission and won their faith, appealing to Crook for the remedies Congress had utterly failed to provide, their hearts were bowed with the tidings that the Great Spirit had summoned the "Gray Fox" to happier hunting-grounds.

Then was there no other appeal? One,—one which had never failed to wring from the government the concession desired. Old chiefs might plead in vain, but the blood of the young warriors is hot and strong, the lust for reputation as vehement as of yore. Every brave stood ripe for action, and no Indian leader ever equalled in craft, in cunning, in adroitness, the scowling old sinner Sitting Bull, and no man need doubt that it was he who gave the cue. Every medicine-man in the Dakota nation began to preach the coming of the Messiah, but the Messiah craze was only the means to an end. Un-koi-to, the Indian Redeemer,—he who ordained that his children should prepare themselves by the savage rites of the ghost-dance to meet him and all their dead ancestry and with them wipe the pale-face from the land,—Un-koi-to was a fraud of the first water, a masquerading scamp of a white man at odds with his own kind, and progressive Indians knew it. But even to such a saviour, when urged by the charlatans in every village, the superstitious nature of the red man turned in eager adulation, and the ghastly, maddening dance went on. Night after night all over the broad Northwest the skies were aglow with the Indian fires. The vault of the heavens echoed to the sound of frenzied shriek and yell and the furious beat of the Indian drum. It is but a step from the ghost-dance to the scalp-dance,—from Indian worship to Indian war. A year ago, in every valley of beautiful South Dakota cattle were browsing on the bunch-grass, settlers ploughing on the plains, women sewing and singing under the new-raised roof-trees, and gleeful children playing in the golden heaps of corn. Now the plough stands idle in the abandoned furrow; the cattle have gone, to make up, presumably, for the reservation shrinkage; women's songs have changed to sobs, children's laughter

hushed to terrified silence, as the settlers seek the refuge of the towns. New red glare in the sky at night, and the new ranch-house lights the way of many a savage warrior, bound with arms and ponies to swell the hostile ranks in the mazes of the Bad Lands.

"God only knows how soon it may come," read Farquhar but a week before, "but I think you would better be with your command." Farquhar relinquished his shooting-trip and at once got him home. He could not bear to tell his people, in the happiest garrison the regiment had ever known, that perhaps it might be as well to drop the plans for the cavalry ball and the Christmas theatricals, the cherished projects for the coming holidays. He hated to have any one ask him if he thought there were not just a chance—just a chance—of their being ordered up there. But even before he left he and Berrien had been talking the matter over. The idea was to always have the regiment ready for anything, and it did seem as though with all the summer and fall marching and scouting and manœuvring in the field they were, as the Englishmen would say, "pretty fit." Fit, certainly, for any amount of scouting or fighting on the southern plains, and yet utterly unprepared for the rigors of a Dakota winter. Any colonel who, serving in Arizona or in the Indian Territory, were to apply for canvas overcoats, blanket-lined, for fur caps, gloves, boots, leggings, etc., intended only for service in the high latitudes, would have been laughed at, if not snubbed. Farquhar decided it best not to let any of the women worry over a possibility. No use borrowing trouble, he said. Long years had the regiment served in that wintry land. Fierce and incessant had been its campaigns against the Indians. Dire had been its sufferings and losses. Only recently—only within the year—had they reached this paradise, with its hazy landscape, its lovely peaceful homes, its kindliness and greeting yet warm in remembrance, the edge of its cheer still new and unworn.

And then Kenyon came back from leave, a burly major of foot who had been visiting at his old home in Chicago, and was reported to be wearing the willow for a girl who had but just married a mere junior first lieutenant in the Eleventh, their predecessors along this line. It might be that Kenyon was cross and crabbed. The youngsters called him "grumbly" at first acquaintance. It might be that he was so hipped and unhappy himself he could not bear to see the bliss and content on every face about him. He and Rolfe were congenial spirits, said the boys, for "both of them got left." But Kenyon, close-mouthed as he was at times, had watched things a day or two, and then had given Farquhar a "pointer." He had heard something, he said, at division head-quarters. Hence the order for "turn out everybody, field-kits and fifty rounds."

The maddest man at mess at one-thirty was Mr. Carroll Brewster,—"Curly B" his comrades called him in the years gone by, when he had much kink to the blond hair of his handsome head and not a vestige thereof to the down on his lip. Now, as first lieutenant of the "Black Troop," with a moustache all bristle and curl, and with a pate whereon the curls were cropped to regulation lines, he was a very different sort of fellow. All the morning long he had sat on a garrison court, where as "swing member" he had not enough to do to keep him from brooding over his woes. He had counted on spending the hours from two until stables basking in the light of those wonderful, deep, dark eyes of Miss Winifred Berrien. Somewhat petted and spoiled in his earlier years of service, Brewster had had much of the nonsense knocked out of him in the harsh experiences of seven years in the saddle with a regiment renowned for its touch-and-go sort of work. He had steadied greatly in those years, part of the process being due to his own latent good sense, and not a little thereof to incessant striving on the range to win high honors as a sharp-shooter, and to-day there was not a finer looking soldier wearing the broad yellow stripes in the Twelfth than this same ex-dandy "Curly Brewster." There still lingered about him a certain repute for self-consciousness, if not for actual conceit, but he had grown to be thoroughly respected in the regiment, and was vastly popular with the men. He was ever ready to umpire their matches at base-ball, coach their shooting, lend his own fishing-tackle or shot-guns to longing sportsmen in the ranks who had none of their own, and he had won the lasting gratitude of C troop, two of whose men were being mobbed by a gang of toughs one windy night in Sheridan City just as Curly came trotting back *en route* to the post. "He was off his horse and into that crowd

quicker than winking," said Murphy, "and the way he laid over that gang with them white fists of his just made my sides crack with delight." He had more sense than they gave him credit for, said the seniors of the regiment, after a while, and, barring an early experience, a cadet love-affair that he was long ago well over, had never let himself go again,—never until the Twelfth came to settle in this happy valley and Winifred Berrien returned from her Eastern school. Then he went all of a sudden. Only one man did not see it: that was Berrien. Only one woman couldn't forgive him his devotion; and she had no business interfering, being herself otherwise disposed of. To his credit be it said, Brewster and the lady's husband were about the only men who appeared unaware of this autumnal infatuation. Nevertheless, in those numberless ways in which women can claim and secure the appearance, at least, of attention from men, the dame had managed to monopolize considerable of his spare time up to the week of Miss Berrien's coming, after which it was not he who rode to town, but she who drove out to the post and sent for him to come and talk to her as she leaned back in her stylish victoria and looked up at him from under her tinted lashes. She could have found it in her heart to strangle the lovely girl so darkly, richly beautiful, but her call upon "the ladies" had been returned when she was conspicuously absent from home, and opportunities for meeting were not afforded by the damsel's parents. There were girls at the post who were quick to see how "Antinoüs" had lost his heart; but these, those at least who were near enough to Winifred to dare allude to the matter at all, were content to archly quote the warning,—

Change the name and not the letter,
Marry for worse and not for better.

There was one man with whom Brewster was at odds, a sentiment due to an old difference when both were younger, and that was Rolfe. There was one man the gallant major especially liked and swore by, and that was Rolfe. These facts, added to the coincidence that the captain had never forgotten the hot words used by his second lieutenant long years before, made a combination most unfortunate for a fellow so much in love as was Carroll Brewster.

On this particular morning he had striven to hurry matters through on the court,—to try three or four cases where the accused were only too ready to plead guilty and "throw themselves on the mercy," etc., and then adjourn on the specious plea of giving the judge-advocate time to write up the proceedings. But the president of the tribunal had other views, and held him. Brewster knew that Randolph and Hunt and Ridgeway, perhaps others, had taken advantage of the weather and no drill to slip over to Berrien's for a blithe morning hour with the girls. He could imagine that pretty parlor, with its pictures and piano, its attractive curtains and portières, the group of bright, sweet faces, the animated chat, Winifred herself, in her dark, rich beauty, seated at the piano, with Ridgeway hanging over her, eager to turn the leaves, eager to do anything that might keep him at her side. Confound the fellow! he had money and a handsome old family homestead. What business had he roughing it in the cavalry, with no end of chances of getting his head knocked off, when his doting mother was so eager to have him come home, marry, settle down, and take up the management of the property his father had left him two years before? Poor "Curly"! he could only gaze wistfully out across the dripping parade from his seat in the dark court-room and watch the glinting of the firelight on the Berriens' parlor window. The major loved a broad fireplace and a hickory blaze, and here he had them to his heart's content for the first time in full twenty years of army wanderings. How must that firelight enhance the cosiness and comfort of the scene within! How must it be flickering about the dark masses of her lustrous hair at this very moment! How——

"How do you vote, Brewster? Are your wits wool-gathering?"

He pulled himself together as best he could; but that was a morning of torment.

And now to think that, after all, he could have no moment at her side this day! To think that Farquhar should have ordered them out for hours of pottering around at saddle-bags, nose-bags, side-lines, lariats, picket-

pins, and all that sort of truck! It was simply barbarous. He curbed his tongue as well as he knew how, for plainly he saw that his chums were mischievously exulting over him, but any one who knew Brewster could see his wrath and discomfiture. The announcement was made just before luncheon was over. The adjutant came bolting in with the order, and shutting his ears to the chorus of expletives.

"What time did you say boots and saddles would sound?" fiercely demanded Randolph.

"In a quarter of an hour: so you've no time to lose saying swear-words or asking damfool questions.—And as for you, Curly, you're for guard to-morrow."

Brewster finished his cup of tea in an undignified gulp, quitting the table and the room in three strides. There was just time to scurry over to Berrien's and see her for five minutes before he had to jump back to his quarters and into riding-boots, etc. Any pretext would answer,—the dance to-night, for instance.

"Get my field-rig ready at once, and bring my horse up here in ten minutes," he called to his servant, slashed at his natty uniform with a whisk broom, and bounded out of the door, only to encounter the man of all others he least cared to see coming in.

"Were you just going, Brewster? There is a matter I want very much to ask you about, and I thought this the time to catch you without fail." The voice was that of Captain Rolfe.

"I *am* just going out, captain, and I'm hurried; but if you will step in I'll be back in ten minutes."

"Well-l, ordinarily I would not detain you, and-d, pardon me, if you were going to Major Berrien's they are all at luncheon. I have just left there."

Brewster flushed in spite of his effort at control. His first impulse was to say he was going over anyhow, if only to leave word, but, since he could not hope to see her, what was the use? It chafed him, however, to note that Rolfe, in that calmly superior way of his, was pressing on into the hall, as much as to say, "It is my will that you give up what you have in view and attend at once to my behest," just as though Brewster were still his second lieutenant, instead of First Lieutenant Brewster commanding the "Black Horse" troop. It must be confessed that there was about Rolfe an intangible something that ever seemed to give that impression to the juniors. It was one of the things that set their teeth on edge, as they expressed it, and set them against him. Feeling as he did towards the captain, and exasperated at the way in which events seemed conspiring against him, Brewster threw open his door.

"Walk in, as I said, captain. Make yourself at home. I wish to go into Haddock's a moment, and will be right back." It wasn't that he had anything to say to Haddock, but Haddock had succeeded him as second lieutenant of Rolfe's troop, and was no fonder of his stern, self-willed commander than Curly himself had been. It was simply that he would not yield a moral victory to Rolfe, and that in naming Haddock he knew he gave at least a slight return for the annoyance afforded him by the captain's untimely call.

Giving no sign whatever as Brewster sprang away down the steps, the captain passed on into the plainly-furnished sitting-room. Already McCann was busy hauling out the lieutenant's field-boots, breeches, and overcoat, whisking off the dust and indulging in Milesian comment as he did so. At sight of Rolfe he abruptly ceased, bustled forward and offered the captain a chair, and a moment later bolted across the hall to perform similar service in overhauling and dusting Mr. Randolph's possessions.

Left to himself, Rolfe wearily turned to the mantel, and, without show of interest, glanced over the various photographs there displayed. They were mainly of army friends, young fellows in whom he felt slight interest at any time and none at all now. So were those in the basket on the round table. Brewster was popular, if one were to judge by the array of pictures that had been sent to him by their prototypes. Then there was a large, handsome album lying open on the desk near the window. Turning listlessly thither, Rolfe gave a shrug of the shoulders, something almost like a shudder, at sight of the photograph which lay uppermost, a cabinet portrait, highly burnished and finished, of an exuberant woman in evening

dress. In that neighborhood everybody knew her by sight. He himself had received invitations in her hand to lunch or to dinner. He knew the writing of the note that lay beside the album, first page uppermost. He would have had no eyes at all had he not seen the "Carroll, *mon ami*," with which it began. With a shiver of disgust he whirled over a page of the album, as though to cover and hide the beguiling face, the betraying words, and then Brewster came bounding back and in. Rolfe's hand was still on the album as he turned to face him. The eyes of the two men met, and again Brewster flushed hotly. He remembered that only in the morning's mail had the large packet arrived containing this unasked-for and unexpected addition to his portrait-gallery. He had not opened it until after court,—had not more than glanced at the photograph even then, beautiful as it was from an artistic point of view. Then that note, and that idiotic semi-sentimental beginning! She had never called him Carroll, but in certain evasive, insinuating, in—well, we have no word for it in all the vocabulary of the United States—in a way he could not but see and could not find a way to object to, she had been lately verging in that direction. It was "Now, Mr. Carroll Brewster," or "my good friend Carroll," or "Sir Carroll," or in-some-way Carroll; but here was an out-and-out Carroll, the first of the kind. A month before he might not have flinched, now he shrank from the mere idea of familiarity of the faintest kind. He had been striving to cut loose from her in every possible way, but hers was a friendship that "clung closer than a brother," and just as sure as shooting Rolfe must have seen that infernal picture, those misleading words. Brewster read it in Rolfe's calm brown eyes, but he would not discuss matters with him, much less stoop to explain.

"You wish to see me, captain. Will you take a seat?"

"No. What I have to ask need occupy but little time, and the call will sound in a moment or two. I am going to ask you a question, and as man to man I want you to answer it." He paused, as though awaiting submissive reply.

"And the question?" asked Brewster, finally and unyielding.

"I was in hopes you would assure me of a readiness to answer. Whatsoever have been the differences between us in the past, you can never accuse me of having pried into your affairs, and the question I wish to ask is one of deep importance to myself, and its answer cannot, I believe, unpleasantly involve you." And still Brewster stood silent, the blue eyes looking straight into the brown. "I will not prolong matters unnecessarily. What I desire to know, Mr. Brewster, is this: Have you, or have you not, some knowledge of the past history of Sergeant Ellis?"

"Pardon me, Captain Rolfe, but I do not see how that can concern you in the least."

"I have stated substantially that it did," was the quiet reply, after a moment's thought. "It concerns me very deeply. I need to know something of his antecedents. I have reason to ask, and I repeat my question."

There was a painful pause. Then Brewster spoke firmly:

"Captain Rolfe, it is a question I refuse to answer."

IV.

That night, despite the long hours in the saddle, the young officers had bidden their lady friends to an informal dance in the hop-room. It was just a week after Nita Guthrie's adventure, and already, except in the thoughts of two or three men, that strange affair was a thing of the past. People had settled down to an acceptance of her own explanation of the cause, not that it was entirely satisfactory, but because no other seemed plausible. Just why a girl should have been rendered nervous and upset because she had had a proposal, Mrs. Vance, of course, could not understand, —"especially," said she, "a girl who was reputed to have had so many offers." It was laughingly remarked by various military Benedicts that since the moment when Miss Guthrie's scream of terror had appalled the garrison the dames and damsels of their several households had shown an unwonted degree of timidity visiting about the post after night-fall, and that much more than the traditional amount of hunting behind curtains

and under bedsteads was now going on. Berrien was especially jocular, and more than ever disposed to tell his cronies in her presence that Berengaria had said this or Berengaria had done that, the this or that being something more than usually absurd or improbable. But in the conversations held of late in the sanctity of Berengaria's boudoir the major had been anything but jocular. There was one incident of that evening that had caused him deep perplexity. He had never for a moment forgotten his wife's allusion to Winifred,—Winifred, the apple of his eye. The possibility of her having lost her young heart to, or even having come to feel more than passing interest in, Carroll Brewster, was something that troubled him far more than he cared to admit. Like many another father, he had gone on fancying his daughter only a child,—one to whom the idea of falling in love would not present itself for years to come, and then only on parental intimation that it was expected of her. Personally and officially he had nothing against Brewster. He liked him quite as well as he did any of the junior officers, and he liked most of them very much indeed. It was as soldierly, manly a lot of young fellows as one could ask to see, but in the close comradeship and intimacy of frontier life men get to know one another so thoroughly and so well that the foibles, weaknesses, and waywardness of the animal are apt to be far more prominently mentioned in garrison-chat than his sterling or lovable traits. Some men, it may be said, have to die before their virtues can be in the least appreciated.

More than once had the major closely interrogated his wife as to the reason of her statement. Had the young fellow dared to speak to Winifred without first asking his permission? Had Winifred dared to fall in love before—but no, that was impossible. "What makes you think she cares for him?"—"How do you know?"—"Why should she care for him, anyhow?" were the impatient questions that rose to his lips. To one and all she had simply replied that she knew because she knew,—woman's unanswerable reason. No, Winifred had not told her. They had never exchanged a word upon the subject. No, Mr. Brewster had not spoken, if by that was meant of love or marriage, for Winifred would have told her on the instant. But half a dozen other people had spoken. The whole garrison could see he was deeply in love with her. Every glance, word, gesture, act, told the story with unerring certainty. "Is there a day, is there an hour, when it is possible for him to see her, speak with her, that he is not by her side?" asked Mrs. Berrien. "You must realize it, major, and you must decide what should be done. She likes him well, that I know, for she is ever ready to dance with him or ride with him, and I can see how her eyes brighten and her color rises when his step or his voice is heard on the veranda."

"But, confound it, Bess!"—which was much nearer Madam's proper name,—"he hasn't anything but his pay."

Mrs. Berrien laughed softly.

"But, Richard, dear, even that detriment has occasionally been overlooked."

"Oh, of course. Exactly. I know. Neither had I. That is what you mean, I suppose. But things were very different then."

"Granted again, Dick,—very different; so much so that were things as they used to be I would be utterly opposed to her marrying in the army."

This being just exactly the view the major had not taken, he could only stare at her in astonishment.

"Bess, what on earth do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Richard. I like what I've seen of Mr. Brewster very much, and I don't wonder Winnie fancies him. He is a gentleman; he is a fine soldier; he has a good record; he is well connected; his family is one of the best that you or I know; he has everything in point of fact to recommend him that you had, my liege, and he has none of your bad habits. You used to drink and smoke and play poker, and, Richard, sometimes you used to swear."

"Well, everybody did in those days."

"Exactly, and hardly anybody does to-day, except, perhaps, one hears a little odd language when the wind is blowing from the drill-ground. But in other respects things are, indeed, different. You and your cronies sometimes talk about how slow and how indifferent young officers are now as compared with what they were twenty years ago. Dick, if the army were

to-day what it was when I married you I would whisk Winnie out of this garrison and never let her venture inside another. But it isn't. In every possible way that a woman and a mother can see, it is vastly better, and you know it. I can conceive of worse fates for our daughter than that she should marry such a man as Mr. Brewster and into such a society as we have here to-day. You are eagerly looking forward to your promotion. Do you think being lieutenant-colonel will compensate you for leaving such comrades and friends as you have in the Twelfth?"

"I'm hoping to exchange."

"You can't, Dick. Nobody will transfer with you who once gets into the Twelfth. And now as to Winifred. You always liked Mr. Brewster. You rather preferred him until lately. What has changed your view?"

"Nothing, except—why—why, Bess, you must have seen or heard, for one thing, this affair with Mrs.——you know."

"As utterly one-sided an affair as ever was known," said Mrs. Berrien, stoutly. "I believe I can see clear through it. I despise the woman. She has always made a dead set at some one of the officers stationed here, I am told. She was just as absurd about Mr. Martin of the Eleventh,—everybody says so in town; and she picked out Brewster because he was the handsomest of the new lot when our regiment came in. Ask any one you choose, and I think my view will hold good. Ask Captain Rolfe what he thinks; and he and Mr. Brewster are not on friendly terms."

"I have asked Rolfe; I asked him only this evening," replied Berrien, turning redder; "and he begged to be excused from expressing an opinion."

"Why?"

"Well, he wouldn't say, but he had seen something or other that we hadn't, and he doesn't like Brewster. I can't have a man making love to Winnie one minute and that calcimined creature the next. I wish there were no dance to-night. I want to see Rolfe again. Who takes her?"

"Mr. Brewster, of course. He asked her two days ago, when the affair was first projected. He is in the parlor now; but so are all the others."

The major stepped over to the window and began thrumming with his pudgy fingers upon the pane. All the joviality and gladness seemed gone from his face. The lights were already beginning to twinkle in the quarters across the parade, and darkness, "wafted downward like a feather," was shutting out the long line of shadowy bluffs beyond the stream. Downstairs he could hear the sound of joyous chatter, the deep voices of the men mingling with the rippling, silvery laughter he knew and loved so well. How happy the child seemed! How she loved the regiment and gloried in his profession! How proud she was at school of the photographs he had from time to time sent of his brother officers, and how the other girls, her letters declared, envied her because she was a soldier's daughter and had lived on the wild frontier! He could hear the sound of other girlish voices, too, Winifred's friends from town, but he found that his ear listened only for hers. How blithe and musical and full of hope and gladness it seemed! How lovely she looked as she came down dressed for dinner just as he returned from that odd, constrained talk with Rolfe! Poor Rolfe! he was given over to the blue devils now, sure enough. He and Kenyon and "Pills," the doctor, formed a triumvirate of sympathetic souls, for since Jennie and "the kids" had gone Holden's life seemed to have fallen into the sear and yellow leaf. Kenyon, as in duty bound, was making the circuit of the garrison returning calls just now, but Rolfe went nowhere except the doctor's. There he could be found almost every evening, for ever since Nita Guthrie's visit the walls of the old house seemed charmed to him. "Begad," said the major, "I'll slip over there to-night myself while the rest of the folks are dancing. I want to see what it is he is holding back."

For the life of him he could not be repellent in manner to Brewster when he went down-stairs. The three young fellows honored with invitations on this particular evening were Brewster, Randolph, and Ridgeway,—Brewster because he was to be Winifred's escort to the hop, the others because they had made the best of matters and invited the other girls, Ridgeway, be it known, not without inward exasperation. He fancied Miss Kitty Pennoyer as a substitute for Winifred Berrien about as much or as little as one is content with a back seat when he cannot have a box. But

it kept him "in touch with the house," so to speak, and gave him opportunities at least of occasional word with the beautiful girl whom he so admired. He knew he was no match for Brewster so far as physique or reputation was concerned, but then girls had been known to prefer patrimonial estate to personal charms, and he meant at least to try the effect of his solid qualifications as against those which made Brewster so attractive to the sex. He knew the major liked him well enough, and he thought he could count on the good offices of Mrs. Berrien, but he was not so sure about Winifred. When the jovial major appeared he was in readiness to pay his respects at once, and was cordially welcomed by that red-faced veteran; so was Randolph; and then there stood Brewster at Winnie's side, both, as it so happened, looking straight at him.

"Well, by Jove, they do make an almost ideal couple!" he said to himself. Brewster fair, stalwart, straight, and soldierly, a picture of manliness and vigor. Winifred dark, yet with so rich a glow mantling the soft creamy skin, with such glorious deep brown-black eyes, so lovely and slender and graceful a form. Her shapely head seemed just on a level with his broad shoulder, and something he had been saying to her in low tone just as the others were greeting her father had sent the blood surging to her cheek. Berrien thought she had never seemed so beautiful, even in his fond eyes. For the first time he began to realize it was a woman, not a child, who stood before him. No wonder Brewster loved her with his whole soul. Why, if he didn't! pshaw! what was he thinking of?

"How are you, Brewster, lad? Glad you're here so early. Your troop made my eyes dance this afternoon." Oh, surrender ignominious! So ended his effort to be repellent. How could he be, with Winifred's soft eyes looking at him so wistfully, so fondly?

And it was good to see Brewster's appreciation of the veteran's allusion to his troop. Gorham, the captain, had been away on leave for some weeks, during which time the lieutenant had had command, and, soldier that he was, had done his utmost to improve the drill and efficiency of his men. It was about the only troop that did not come in for a rasping of some kind at the hands of the colonel that afternoon, and, being in Berrien's battalion, reflected credit, of course, upon the major. Brewster's eyes had kindled and he had lowered his sabre in glad acknowledgment of the brief words of commendation that fell from Farquhar's lips as he completed his rigid inspection of the equipment of the glossy blacks, and the major had supplemented the words by a nod and a glance that spoke volumes. But, while all this was as joy to his soul, it was as nothing as compared with being praised by her father in her hearing. At that precise moment Carroll Brewster stood the happiest man within the limits of a crowded county.

And now at ten o'clock the hop-room was well filled. A number of pleasant people had driven out from town. All the garrison girls were there, most of the elders among the mammas, all the juniors among the matrons, and the dance went merrily on. Delightful music the orchestra of the Twelfth was ever ready to play, and this night their leader seemed inspired. The affair was entirely informal. No written invitations had been sent out. Officers were all in undress uniform, but, with few exceptions, all were there, and the broad stripes of scarlet or yellow or white were to be seen everywhere throughout the room. Mrs. Berrien, a smile of motherly pride in her handsome dark eyes, was chatting pleasantly with the wife of a local magnate who could not say enough about Winifred's grace and beauty, and the gaze of both women seemed to follow the child as she appeared literally to float over the smoothly-polished floor, just lightly borne on Brewster's stalwart arm. It was one of the oldest and sweetest of the Strauss waltzes that was being played at the moment, "Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald," and, slowly reversing and turning, with the eyes of more than half the spectators and wall-flowers upon them, Brewster and Winifred were now gliding across the upper end of the hall within a few feet of the smiling row of lookers-on, almost within touch of the mother's hand. His face wore a look no woman could for an instant mistake. His eyes, full of passionate tenderness, were fixed at the instant upon her lovely face. His lips were moving. Something was being said.

"*There* is one couple at least that is utterly lost to the rest of the world," said Mrs. Vance, for of a sudden the lovely upturned face was bowed al-

most upon his arm, and the deep, dark eyes were veiled, and the soft flush seemed to leap through the creamy skin to her very temples.

"Oh, has that fellow Ridgeway no sense whatever?" she continued, with all a woman's horror of an interrupted love-scene, for at the instant Ridgeway had darted forth, watch in hand, with a triumphant shout, "Time! My half!" And without a word, with one swift upward glance into Brewster's longing eyes,—a glance fairly brimming over with meaning,—Winifred released herself from the half-encircling arm and placed her hand on Ridgeway's sleeve. Another moment, and she was being whirled away under the guidance of a very different partner.

"Miss Berrien's fan," said Brewster, bowing a moment later before her mother. "I was charged to place it in your hands." His heart was beating high. The music seemed thrilling, throbbing, through his veins. He longed to hold forth both hands and say, "Read my secret. Know my heart! I love her! oh, I love her!" But there sat Mrs. Van Ness, the banker's wife, with broad sympathy and approval glowing in her good-natured face.

"Ah, Mr. Brewster, it wasn't easy to give up half that dance,—was it, now? Why do you do such things in the army?"

"There were only four waltzes, Mrs. Van Ness," smiled Mrs. Berrien. "Mr. Brewster had had one, and had claimed this, and Mr. Ridgeway had had none at all, and Winifred and I both thought he ought not to be denied entirely. It is the only round dance he knows."

Saying no word, Brewster had dropped behind Mrs. Berrien's chair.

"He doesn't know that any too well," said Mrs. Van Ness to herself. "Where could he have learned to dance?" The floor was crowded at the moment, and unusually slippery, so that reversing or avoidance of collision was rendered the more difficult even for experts. Twice had Ridgeway bumped into somebody or other, without grievous disaster, but now, as luck would have it, came catastrophe. In the effort to check himself suddenly just as he seemed shooting into contact with a slender light-battery man whom he could not have touched had he tried, the young fellow's feet flew from under him. Left to herself, Winifred would no more have fallen than a bird. Drowning men clutch at straws, and poor, rich Ridgeway's instant impulse on feeling himself going was to clasp her the tighter, dragging her with him in his ignominious crash. His tumble was bad enough, though he was unhurt, but hers was worse. With violent shock her head struck the polished floor, and the room swam around. A dozen men flew to aid her, but Brewster seemed to have seen it coming. He leaped through the air, and, bending over the prostrate Ridgeway, had her up in his strong arms and over at the window before another hand could touch her.

"Quick, Hunt, some water!" he ordered, his teeth firmly set. Then how his eyes softened as he looked down into her pallid face! "Oh, my darling, my darling!" he murmured in that little, shell-like ear; and then, with wild anxiety in her eyes, Mrs. Berrien burst through the sympathetic circle.

It was all over in a moment. The music never ceased. She was stunned only for an instant, and then, though Mrs. Berrien would have interposed, like the little heroine she was, Winifred was on her feet and holding out her hand to poor, bewildered, miserable Ridgeway.

"But come, we must finish the dance," she said, and in so saying riveted the chains of his serfdom.

"*I* wouldn't dance with him again," said Mrs. Vance, who had an opinion to express on every subject. "Why, he almost broke her head."

"If she didn't, she'd break his heart, Mrs. Vance," was old Kenyon's reply, as he watched the scene. "That girl's a lady."

"Am I not to be honored to-night, Mr. Brewster?" said a low voice in his ear as he stood silent, anxious, preoccupied, by Mrs. Berrien's side, his eyes following Winifred about the room. The very intonation made him turn cold.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Knowles, I only saw a moment ago that you were here."

She was leaning on her husband's arm. "Not half a bad fellow, if he is a blind fool," said those of his own sex who knew him. Years her senior, he was yet her slave. Witness his coming out from town this late November night solely at her behest to attend a dance to which neither was bidden.

"Ah, I wonder you saw at all, my friend, with that vision before your eyes; and I presume that was why you had no time to come in person with your invitation."

"No invitations are sent out for these little dances, Mrs. Knowles."

"There, there, I'm not going to upbraid you here.—Mr. Knowles, would you get me a glass of water?—Mr. Brewster, will you not present me to Mrs. Berrien? We have exchanged calls, but I have not yet had the pleasure."

What could he do? The request was as audible to Mrs. Berrien as to him, and, even as she spoke, Mrs. Knowles passed around in front of him so as almost to face the major's wife, taking the introduction as a matter of course. He glanced appealingly at Mrs. Berrien as he murmured the name. He blessed her in his heart of hearts for the calm courtesy with which she greeted the local celebrity. He bit his lips with vexation at Mrs. Knowles's very first words:

"I could not resist the longing to know you, Mrs. Berrien, for I am utterly lost in admiration of your lovely daughter." She, daring to speak of one so pure, so innocent, so utterly beyond her! Turning impatiently away, he encountered Major Berrien's eyes fixed upon him with a look that was not good to see. He stepped forward, hoping to explain, but Berrien, who had just entered the room after an absence of over half an hour, whirled sharply about, plainly indicating that he did not wish to speak. This was bad enough. He had been near the seventh heaven of bliss. He had almost touched the gates of pearl. Now they were receding through clouds and darkness, fading in the distance. But worse was to come. Mrs. Knowles had seated herself by Mrs. Berrien's side, pouring forth rapid compliment and confidence. The music had ceased. Ridgeway, with Winifred on his arm, was approaching, slowly, checked every moment by man or woman who begged to hear that she was not shocked or seriously hurt. It was not until she was within a few yards that Winifred caught sight of her mother's companion,—caught sight of the faint gesture and the warning in her mother's eyes. Then she pressed her escort's arm and turned him away.

"Oh, do call Miss Winifred here. I so long to meet her, Mrs. Berrien," cried Mrs. Knowles; and what could Mrs. Berrien do? The flush died out of Winifred's cheeks, the soft lustre from her eyes. Obedient to her mother's unwilling summons, she stood before the lady from town, but she stood erect, and there was not the faintest cordiality in her manner. The long-lashed lids drooped over her eyes as she bowed to the elder woman, but her hand, to Ridgeway's delight, refused to withdraw from his arm. No one saw more plainly than did Mrs. Knowles that nothing could be more unwelcome than that introduction; and it stung her to the quick. Checking the fulsome flatteries that were ready on her tongue, she said,—

"I could not go, Miss Berrien, without saying how frightened I was for you and how glad to see you were not hurt." Then, turning languidly, "And now, Carroll, will you take me to the carriage? Somebody can call Mr. Knowles.—*Good*-night, Mrs. Berrien. *Do* come and see me." And, taking Mr. Brewster's unoffered arm, she led him down the brightly-lighted and observant room.

V.

It is Mr. Thomas Hughes who asks in "Tom Brown at Oxford," "Which is the true—ay, and the brave—man, he who trembles before a woman or he before whom a woman trembles?" There are men who could have found it no difficult matter to flatly decline to serve even as temporary escort to a woman so evidently bent on mischief,—who could have rebuked then and there the assumption of intimacy and proprietorship which if unchallenged might mean disaster. Brewster did neither. She read him well enough to see that, though he was too indignant to permit himself to speak, he was also too much of a gentleman to snub her. Bravely, therefore, she bore her part, keeping up an animated flow of meaningless words until fairly out of the hop-room, then promptly shifting to that feminine coigne of vantage wherein lies woman's greatest strength,—a gush of silent tears. She knew too much to add reproaches, accusations, angry words: that would have

given him something to answer, something to overthrow. It is only when a woman weeps, silently, desolately, showing no anger, making no charge, that she has man at her mercy. Utterly false as was the position in which she had placed Brewster before the garrison world at this moment, he actually did not know but that he might be blamable for all,—that he might be much less sinned against than sinning. He was no fool, only so much of one as the strongest of his kind sometimes become in the hands of the softer sex. Samson had his Delilah; Hercules, Omphale; Belisarius, poor devil, had both Antonia and Theodora.

It was bad enough to have her shrink to the opposite side of the carriage the instant he had assisted her in and there give way to apparently uncontrollable weeping; it was bad enough to have to stand there for a moment or two until the lady's long-suffering spouse should be hunted up (he had been having a cigar with one or two of the elders in the sanctity of the little smoking-room); but what made matters simply intolerable was that just at the foot of the stairs, under the broad gallery, just where the lantern on the big pillar would shine full upon himself and his lachrymose partner, stood Major Berrien in earnest conversation with Captain Rolfe, and both looked up, glanced quickly but searchingly at him and at her, raised their forage-caps in silent salutation, and turned away. Poor Curly! As in duty bound, he leaned into the carriage, not too ardently begging the weeping dame to say what had so distressed her, but she would not reply. Possibly she thought he might yet be induced to clamber in after her and there in the dark interior tenderly beseech her to speak; but he was all eagerness to hasten back to the hop-room. If he could but have speech with Mrs. Berrien a moment, he might make her understand the situation: she had always been cordial and sympathetic. But it was three or four minutes, perhaps, before Knowles came, thanked him for his attention to his wife, stepped in, and—how her tears were explained to her liege lord nobody knows. Somebody who knew her, however, was mean enough to suggest that they were of the theatrical and controllable order, and, as Randolph expressed it, "she braced up and grinned as soon as Curly was left behind."

The instant the carriage rolled away, Brewster turned and sped up the stairs. At the very top he met the colonel coming hastily down, a brown telegraph envelope in his hand, the soldier operator, with a look of repressed excitement on his face, close at his heels.

"Come with me, Brewster," said Farquhar, in preoccupied but positive manner.—"Morgan, find the adjutant and quartermaster, and say that I wish to see them at the office."

"I'll get my cap and follow you at once, sir," answered Brewster, and hastened into the dressing-room. There he met Hazlett and Thorpe just coming out, throwing their cavalry capes over their shoulders, silent and preoccupied like their chief. Seizing his cap, Brewster paused one longing instant for a glance into the hop-room. Again the floor was thronged. To the merriest of music—"Toujours Galant"—the younger dancers were fairly romping in the half-galop, half-polka step the joyous tune inspires, and in their midst, not romping, but dancing with a slower, almost languid grace, Winifred Berrien appeared to his troubled gaze, her slender waist half encircled by Randolph's arm, her dark eyes downcast, her color and animation gone.

"Come, Brewster," called Hazlett from the door-way, "Farquhar wants us at once, and does not want anybody else to know."

"What's up?"

"You'll know in a moment. The colonel doesn't want it mentioned here."

At the foot of the stairs under the glare of the same big lamp, Farquhar, with Berrien and Rolfe, stood waiting. Glancing impatiently up as though to make sure of his men, Farquhar took Berrien by the arm and silently led the way, Rolfe and Hazlett, Thorpe and Brewster, falling in behind. It was but a few steps to the office.

"Pull down the shades, orderly; and one lamp will be enough. That'll do. Close the door, and remain outside," said Farquhar, as he threw off his cape, then silently waited until the sleepy trumpeter had carried out his orders and vanished. By this time, too, Warren and Drake, the adjutant and the quartermaster, had come bustling in, and, noting the silence of those already on the ground, simply removed their caps and waited the colonel's

pleasure. For an instant Farquhar stood tapping the lid of the desk with the butt of his pencil and studying the long despatch which he held in his hand. Then he looked up.

"Gentlemen, we are ordered to the field; one battalion to go at once, the other to follow in ten hours,—just as soon as cars can be provided. —Berrien, you will lead off."

For a moment not a word from anybody; then the major spoke:

"How much time have we, sir?"

"I cannot tell. You load up the moment the railway-company can get a train here. They have plenty of engines and cars at the junction, and ought to be able to furnish what we need by daybreak. Meantime, you will have to rouse your men, pack up everything that is not to be taken, cook three days' rations, and be ready to get the horses aboard. Go at it as quietly as possible. I want nobody at the hop to know of the orders. Let the dance go on. Your men must take all their blankets and the heaviest clothing they have. No one knows what may be in store for us either in furs or fighting."

Again dead silence, broken only by the rapid clicking of the telegraph instrument in the adjoining room and the soft, melodious strains borne on the wings of the whispering night wind. Another waltz, and one which she had promised him he should have the latter half of, thought Brewster. Even now he listened yearningly to recognize the strain. Ay, he might have known it! her favorite of all,—"Love's Dreamland."

But the colonel was speaking again: "Of course you will do well to weed out any sick or ineffectives you may have. It is going to be a bitter campaign, and after our summer and fall under Southern suns will be all the tougher. Holden will go with your command, Berrien, and I have sent for him. Here are your four troop commanders: so you may as well give your instructions at once and let them get to work."

"You have heard the colonel's orders, gentlemen: I do not know of anything I have to add. Start out your first sergeants and the cooks at once, and let the men pack without unnecessary noise. I will give all further details as soon as Colonel Farquhar and I have had a few moments' conference."

Again the telegraph operator, with a despatch.

"I thought so," said Farquhar. "Murray, the division superintendent, was with us in the Shenandoah and at Five Forks. He wires that the train will be here at five o'clock at the latest,—two engines, twenty freight- or cattle-cars, two baggage-cars, four passenger day-cars, and a Pullman. It is eleven now. If anything is wanted you'll find me here."

Back again into the chill night air, under the shining, starry vault, Berrien and his four troop leaders paused for a moment on the gravel walk.

"Hazlett, I suppose you will need to see Mrs. Hazlett home, and you, Thorpe. Better go and rouse your sergeants first, then come back to the hop-room; but, mind you, not a word there. Rolfe, you and Brewster are among the blessed to-night: you have no wives to break the news to. I will give your subalterns the tip to report to you just as soon as we break up."

Three hands went to the cap-visor in salute, three officers turned away. Warren, the adjutant, came hurrying out:

"Oh, major, Colonel Farquhar begs that you will step in a moment."

"You had something to say, Brewster?" asked the major, coldly.

"Yes, sir: I—I hope to hurry back in time to escort Miss Berrien home."

"No, don't trouble yourself. I'll attend to that. You have other matters to occupy you." And if ever a father's tone signified that dismissal was intended, and that further attentions were forbidden, Berrien's did as he abruptly turned, leaving Brewster stunned and silent at the edge of the parade.

In ten minutes lights were dancing like will-o'-the-wisps about the gallery of the men's quarters. Quick, bounding footsteps could be heard, and the low, brief orders of the sergeants as they went flitting from door to door. Then half-suppressed exclamations, an occasional smothered yell of excitement or delight from some enthusiastic Paddy, ever ready for a frolic or a fight. Then a gradually swelling murmur of voices, the rapid scurry

of booted feet, a clattering up and down the stairways, the slamming and banging of barrack doors, the dragging forth of heavy chests and boxes, the clank of a dropped sabre, and then people at the hop-room, strolling out on the broad veranda for fresh air or flirtation, became aware of the unusual illumination over across the parade, and listening heard the sounds of bustle and preparation. And then lights began to pop up among the windows of the second battalion, where the news had rapidly spread, and where dozens of troopers tumbled out of their blankets and into their boots forthwith and went charging *en masse* upon their own sergeants to know what it meant that "them fellers in the first battalion had had orders to be up and getting and none had come for us." In less time than it takes to tell it, the tidings spread from porch to hall that "something was up," and other people, men and women, old officers and young, matrons and maids, quit their places in the Lancers and came streaming forth upon the gallery. "What's the matter?"—"Is it fire? I heard no alarm."—"The trumpets haven't sounded."—"See! there's the orderly trumpeter going across the parade now, running to the office."—"Why, the office is lighted, too."—"Where's Warren?"—"What does it mean?" These and dozens of other verbal conjectures and suggestions flew from lip to lip. Men excused themselves to their fair partners, seized their caps, scurried away down the steps, and sped over towards the lights at head-quarters. A dozen or more suddenly disappeared in this way, and then it was found that the colonel and Berrien and Hazlett and Thorpe and Brewster, too, were all missing. And then Mrs. Thorpe's voice was heard wailing out upon the night air:

"Oh, Mrs. Berrien! Mrs. Berrien! I know what it means. I saw the telegraph operator coming up the steps. It's orders,—orders for the field."

And then indeed

> There was hurrying to and fro,
> And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,
> And cheeks all pale which but an hour ago
> Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness.

And the dance was forgotten, and the musicians, astonished, found the lighted hall rapidly emptying of the revellers, and women pressed, pallid and tearful, into the dressing-room, gathering up their wraps with hasty hand and hurrying forth to take the arm of husband or lover, as though claiming that right to the very last. And then in some way the word went round, "Only one battalion goes,—only Berrien's;" and those whose lords were attached to the other plucked up heart and spirit for a moment, and in the midst of it all, pale but tearless, Mrs. Berrien stood waiting patiently for Dick's return, and by her side, even paler, but as brave and tearless and patient, Winifred clung to her mother's arm and would take no other. Ridgeway, who had scampered over to the office among the dozen departed, came panting back up the stairway.

"Is it true?" asked Mrs. Berrien.

"Yes; the first battalion goes at daybreak. The major says he will be over in a few moments."

"Mrs. Berrien, permit me to escort you home," said Major Kenyon, hastening after Ridgeway up the stair. "I have just seen Berrien: he has to go to the barracks a few minutes."

"Miss Winifred, may I have the pleasure? Mr. Brewster is, of course, needed with his troop, and mine does not go," said Ridgeway, proffering his arm. The girl hesitated one moment, half clinging to her mother's side, and casting one swift, appealing glance into her face.

"Yes, daughter, we'll go home at once," was the low-toned answer as Mrs. Berrien took old Kenyon's arm, and with bowed head moved towards the stairs, her escort eagerly, volubly explaining to her that he felt sure the object of the sudden move was merely to overawe the Indians by a display of force. "It is exactly what was done here with such success a few years ago, Mrs. Berrien. The Cheyennes were wild for an outbreak, and Sheridan simply called in troops from everywhere, and when the Indians saw the great array of cavalry and infantry they caved at once. Never had to fire a shot, madam. And that's the proper way to handle this matter. That's what this means. The Sioux will be so disheartened they won't dare resist even if orders are given to disarm them.—God forgive me the lie!" he muttered under his breath.—"Of course it's exasperating to think of the

Twelfth being sent so far away at such a time, but better now, believe me, than later after those misguided wretches had had a chance to jump."

But Mrs. Berrien had lived, heaven only knows how, through many a similar experience. She had seen time and again her husband's command hurried forth on the trail or across the path of savage foe. Never yet had they returned unscathed, never yet without serious loss of officers and men. She could only bow her head the lower while her lips moved in silent prayer. Just as they reached the gate a tall form came springing after them through the darkness, and Brewster's voice was heard:

"I hurried back to the hop-room, Miss Winifred, only to find you gone. I had expected to escort you home. You have heard the news? You know our orders have come?" He glared at Ridgeway, as much as to say, "Leave, man; you are one too many, as you ought to see." But the junior lieutenant stoutly held his ground, nor did Winifred withdraw her hand from his arm.

"I have heard; yes, it seems very sudden," was all she could or would say, and the dark eyes were shrouded from his longing gaze.

"We'll be off by daybreak, I fear. I cannot hope to see you again before we have to go," he went on, desperately.

"Won't you come in, Mr. Brewster?" called Mrs. Berrien from the steps. "You and Mr. Ridgeway can spare a moment, can you not?—Oh, Dick, here you are!" she cried, as with quick, energetic step the major sprang across the road and appeared under the dim light of the garrison lamp, and back to the gate she sped to meet him and to twine her arm in his.

"I'll say good-night, ladies," said Kenyon. "I'll call in in the morning to see if I can be of any service. Now I must trot over and help Holden to pack." And, unrestrained, he went.

"Brewster, Ridgeway, I won't ask you in now. You have much to attend to, and but little time.—Run in, Winifred," said the major.—"I'll be with you at the barracks in a few moments, gentlemen."

Slowly but obediently Winifred stepped forward.

"Good-night, Mr. Ridgeway," she murmured, holding out her little hand. "Thank you very much."

Berrien stood impatiently at the gate, as though to see her safely through. With trembling lips Brewster spoke as he sprang to her side.

"Good-by. Don't forget," was all he could murmur, as he seized her hand, clinging to it one miserable moment with both his own.

"Good-by," she said, in low, tremulous tone, but withdrawing her hand, withholding her glance. The major threw his arm about her and almost thrust her through the gate.

"It is good-night only, not good-by, Mr. Brewster," said Mrs. Berrien, kindly, forgetting her own misery for the moment in the contemplation of the woe in his face. Then they hurried within-doors, Winifred drooping before them, and then the door closed, and Brewster and Ridgeway stood there confronting each other under the light. For a moment neither spoke.

"Have you lost your crossed sabres?" said Brewster, finally, noting that the handsome cap-badge of solid gold which Ridgeway ordinarily wore upon the front of his forage-cap was now missing.

"No; I took it off to pin Miss Berrien's wrap about her throat."

A moment more Brewster stood, as though he would ask another question, then abruptly turned and plunged into the darkness.

Meantime, Major Kenyon had trudged up the row towards Holden's quarters. Already the lights were beginning to gleam from the various houses around the big quadrangle of the parade, where a dozen of the cavalry officers were now busily engaged in preparation for the sudden move. Over at the hospital, too, the lamps were being lighted in the steward's room and the dispensary. Holden's hall door stood wide open. The hall itself was dark, but a lamp was alight in the sitting-room, and that door, too, was wide open. A tall form passed across the illumined space as Kenyon drew near. He stopped for a moment at the gate, listening to the sound of bustle, the whistling and singing of the men at the barracks. "Hardship, hunger, privation, suffering ahead of them, even if they don't have hard fighting," he muttered to himself. "In thirty-six hours they'll be freezing, poor devils, for not a man in the battalion has a winter kit;

and just hear them laugh and sing as though the world had no joy like soldiering! God guard them,—and these poor wives and sweethearts here. Why isn't it my lot to go instead of Berrien's? Who the devil would shed a tear for me?" He shook himself together and tramped heavily into the gate and up the steps.

"Doc!" he called at the door-way. "Oh, Doc!"

No answer. The house was silent.

"Oh, Holden! Where are you?" Still no reply. "Odd," said Kenyon: "I thought I saw him in here. Who could that have been?" With the confidence of army intimacy he tramped through the sitting-room on the left of the hall, then into the dining-room beyond. No one there. Then across the hall again and into Holden's own sleeping-room at the rear of the house. The kerosene lamp was burning on the dressing-table. The bed had been occupied. Evidently Holden had turned in early, only to be routed out by the orders of the colonel. The floor creaked somewhere overhead. Then he was sure he heard a quick, light foot-fall on the stair. "Oh, Doc! Here I am. It's Kenyon," he cried. But no answer came. Once more returning to the hall, and thence to the sitting-room, he found them empty as before. The parlor door on the west side was closed. Slowly he strolled out on the front piazza, just in time to catch sight of a tall form in the dark circular cape striding up to the gate. Surely that was Holden. Then he heard a hail:

"Hello, Rolfe. That you?"

"Yes. You go with us, do you?"

"I do. Won't you come in?"

"Not just now: I've got to go to my quarters a moment. I'll be in by and by. We'll have to make a night of it."

"All right. Kathleen will get us some coffee after a while. Bring in some of the others with you." Then the doctor came bounding up the steps. "Hello, Kenyon. You here? Well, you were right after all, weren't you? I've just been over to the hospital to see to the field-chests."

"Weren't you in here just now?" asked Kenyon.

"I? No! Not for ten minutes."

"Well, some one was here,—up-stairs and down both. I called twice and got no answer, but I saw a man and heard the steps. Thought it was you."

"Rolfe, perhaps. He was in the road just beyond our gate as I came back; but I thought he had just come from his company quarters."

"If it had been Rolfe he would have answered, I should think," said Kenyon. "Besides, the figure and the footsteps were those of a much lighter man."

"Queer!" said Holden, his thoughts instantly reverting to the event of the week before. "Did you see him?"

"I saw a figure pass across the light streaming from the sitting-room door. Then I heard the step up-stairs while I stood in your room, and then very quick, light steps on the stairs,—some one coming down like a streak, now that I think of it."

"How long ago?"

"Not more than a minute before you got here."

"By Jove, I'm going to look into this!" said Holden, quickly. "Of course you've heard of the excitement we had here. Bring that candle, will you? I'll take the lamp." Up the stairs they went,—up to the landing where Nita Guthrie had her mysterious fright and fall. The door of the room she occupied was open. All was darkness within. Holden, followed by Kenyon, entered, and they set their lights upon a table. The side window was shut and barred, the south windows as firmly closed. Everything looked neat and undisturbed, but cold and deserted. No sign of an intruder, for a moment, to the eyes of either man. Then of a sudden Holden made a spring for the toilet table, seized a small silver frame, and stood glaring at it.

"By Jove! look here!"

"What's the matter?" asked Kenyon.

"Don't you see?" was the answer, as the doctor held the face of the frame towards him, empty and gaping. "Nita Guthrie's photograph was in this frame and on that table just before the hop began when I was up here; and where is it now?"

VI.

Pallid and wan the first faint gleam of the coming day was stealing slowly into the eastern skies. Far away down the broad valley the mist was creeping from the slow-moving, silent stream. Peace and slumber and solitude hovered over the wide acres where the tasselled corn had waved in the summer breeze and the bearded rye and bristling wheat had ripened and bleached under the fervid touch of the summer sun. In the barn-yards and sheds the cattle still crouched, drowsing and huddling for warmth. In the orchards and among the maples and beeches the bluebirds and jays and belated robins still perched among the autumn leaves, their heads tucked away under sheltering wings. Under dew-laden hedge-rows the mother bird nestled her little brown brood, and Bob White still dozed away the dark hour that precedes the dawn. All over the placid, populous valley without the reservation lines, the wings of night were spread. All through the streets of the thriving county town only the tread of the watchman waked the echoes, only the glimmer of his lamp was seen. The waning moon, a dim, mist-bedraggled crescent, had peeped up over the shadowy forest down the eastward valley and climbed slowly towards a sheltering bank of cloud and there had seemed to halt and hide. Puffing and panting, a long, long train had wound under the wooded bluffs and was hissing at the station platform at the foot of the curving road that led to the broad plateau of the fort. And now lights were dancing and gleaming everywhere along the train; men in cavalry overcoats and top-boots were busily, rapidly, silently leading horse after horse up the wooden ramps or chutes and into the dark depths of the cattle-cars. Many a trooper stopped a moment after lashing his halter-strap to the rail and murmured a few caressing, reassuring words to his wondering charger, patting him on neck or shoulder and striving to explain to him how it happened that he was stirred out from his warm stable at this unseemly hour and marched into a prison-pen on wheels behind those black, hissing monsters up ahead. Silence and order and discipline prevailed. Only when some excitable, nervous steed balked and refused to climb the chute, was there unusual sound. Then the sharp crack of the stable sergeant's whip and a stern "Hup there!" brought the brute to his senses, and he plunged along up the wooden ramp, his iron-shod hoofs thundering on the boards, his trooper's arms nearly wrenched from their sockets. The division superintendent had been better than his word, for it was only four o'clock when the train came hissing in, and in ten minutes, in long ghostly procession, Rolfe's men were leading their chargers, curveting and prancing in the keen air, down the winding road to the valley, the quartermaster's wagons following with chest and box and bale and bundles of tentage and camp equipage. In fifteen minutes more the word went up to send down the next troop, and the train pulled forward four car-lengths, so as to bring the next lot of horse-cars opposite the platform and chutes, while Thorpe's handsome sorrels were led wondering from the dimly-lighted gangway; and so, by a few minutes after five, even the officers' chargers and the spare horses of the first battalion were all aboard, and somewhere across the stream, just as the major acknowledged the report "All aboard and secure, sir," in Hazlett's soldierly tones, a sprightly chanticleer, whose ears had at last caught those muffled sounds of hoof and voice over under the garrison bluffs, concluded it time to challenge, and woke the echoes with shrill cock-a-doodle-doo, whereat there came a low chuckle of delight from Hazlett's men.

"Very good, sir. Now get aboard all your baggage as quick as you can."

"All aboard now, sir."

"Then march up to quarters for coffee and breakfast,—the others are at theirs now,—and form under arms right afterwards."

Precious little sleep has there been this night,—no time among the men, no inclination among the women. Wives and daughters who had devoutly thanked heaven that only the first battalion was to go were soon undeceived, and found that but ten hours' respite was to be theirs. All the night long the note of preparation could be heard in barracks and in quarters. The colonel, with his adjutant and quartermaster, hardly left the office at all. Berrien bustled from barracks to his home, from there to stables. At two o'clock, finding all his own campaigning-kit in perfect readiness, and Winifred and her mother still huddling over the parlor fire, he noted the pallor

in his daughter's face, the deep trouble in her pathetic eyes, and, taking her in his arms, he kissed her fondly again and again.

"Go to your room now, little daughter," he said, huskily: "go, dear, and try to sleep. I will not leave without coming to say bye-bye, just as I always did." She shivered and hid her face and clung to his neck, saying no word, shedding no tear. Gently he unclasped her hands. "Yes, my child, do as I bid you now: I want to speak with mother awhile." And then reluctantly she turned, but the one brief look into his eyes was so full of wordless sorrow that he was for an instant unmanned. "My little girl! my little Winnie! don't look at your old daddy that way!" he almost sobbed, as again he threw his arm around her, leading her to the stairs. "We won't be gone long. We're all coming back, dear; and we'll have a lovely Christmas, and you shall have the jolliest kind of a party, pet. But be a brave little woman now. It—it'll all come right." She turned with quick convulsive sob and threw herself upon his breast, again twining her soft arms about his neck, her beautiful dark hair streaming in rippling, shimmering masses down over the creamy white wrapper. The burst of tears would have been a blessed relief, but it never came. A quick, soldierly tread was heard on the plank walk without, and then springing up the steps. Even before the rat-tat-tat at the door she had torn herself from his arms, and sped like startled fawn up the carpeted stair.

"It is Mr. Brewster," said Mrs. Berrien, in low tone, quickly. Berrien threw open the door. "Anything for a pretext to come here again," he muttered angrily to himself, as he confronted the unwelcome intruder. It *was* Brewster.

"Major Berrien, the colonel's compliments, and he desires you to know that the train will be here at four instead of five." And Brewster's eyes glanced but an instant into those of his superior, and then went wandering longingly over his shoulder.

"I had already heard it, sir. You have everything ready?"

"I beg pardon, then, for disturbing you, major. I have just left the colonel, and he thought you might not have heard. Yes, sir, everything will be ready, though the rations are not yet cooked."

"Then be ready to get your horses aboard the moment F has finished loading. Anything else, Mr. Brewster?" Poor fellow, there was something else,—something that filled heart and soul and dominated every thought. Gazing wistfully up the stairs, his sad eyes had caught one glimpse of that white, fleeting form, one glimpse of the lovely pallid face all framed in dark, falling tresses, as, clinging to the balustrade, Winifred turned, unable to resist the longing to hear what he might have to say.

"Nothing—nothing more, I believe, sir." And, mechanically raising his hand in salute, poor Curly turned away, the door promptly closing behind him.

Berrien came back into the parlor clinching his fists, speechless indignation in his face. Mrs. Berrien saw the unmistakable signs, and, though in her heart she felt full of sympathy for Brewster, she knew it best to say nothing now.

"If I thought it as you said," he hoarsely spoke at last,—"if I thought that fellow had been trifling with Winnie while all the time carrying on this—— Faugh! it makes me feel as though I could throttle him!" And Berrien strode up and down the cosey room, beating one brawny fist into the palm of the other hand.

"But, Richard dear, why do you think there has been anything serious between him and this—this woman? I think she deliberately assumed that manner at the hop to-night. I think she called him 'Carroll' solely for Winifred's benefit and mine. I saw how astonished and annoyed he was."

But Berrien held up a warning hand. "She came down the stairs weeping and he striving to soothe her. She was sobbing aloud when he put her in the carriage. Rolfe and I both saw and heard. Don't tell me there wasn't anything between them. Very possibly he does want to make up to Winifred now, but, damn him! he shan't. I won't have her degraded by any such offer, if I have to send her and you to Europe to get her away from him. It is no imagination, Bess: I tell you I know. Why, only this morning she sent him a new picture of herself; and as for calling him Carroll for our benefit, that's what she calls him in her letters, and I can prove it."

"How, Dick?"

"Rolfe saw it,—saw it this very morning."

"Captain Rolfe! Why, how came he to see her letter to him?"

"Well, it was lying open on his desk: he could not help seeing."

"Why, Dick, I cannot understand Captain Rolfe's looking at or reading other people's letters, and——"

"It was an accident, I tell you."

"Ah, but it was no accident his telling of it, Dick. Nothing on earth should have induced him to refer to it, if, as he claims, he saw it by accident. I did not suppose Rolfe would do such a thing."

"Well, he couldn't help himself. I dragged it out of him, I suppose."

Another step, another rap at the door, and, casting one glance aloft, Berrien, to his dismay, again caught sight of Winifred's pale face peering over the balustrade. The child could not, would not rest.

"What's wanted?" he curtly asked, as he threw open the door.

"It is Sergeant Ellis, sir," said a deep voice. "I have come to beg the major to intercede for me. My troop goes with the major's battalion, and I begged to be relieved and allowed to go; but the quartermaster says I must stay until some sergeant can be found who is competent to take charge,—some one in the infantry battalion. That may require two or three days, sir, and I am fearful that once the command gets away there will be no obtaining orders to follow it. Besides, sir, there is my horse."

"You belong to the black troop?"

"Yes, sir, and I think that if the major would but speak to Major Kenyon at once he could name a sergeant who would take my place here at the fire-house. Almost any man can do it, sir; only there is no time to be lost. Major Kenyon is at the doctor's now."

"Dr. Holden's?"

"Yes, sir, and Captain Rolfe has just joined him there."

"Have you spoken to Lieutenant Brewster? He commands your troop, as you know, now that the captain's away."

"I have, sir, but it was at the office, and the quartermaster spoke up at once, so that Lieutenant Brewster could do nothing."

Berrien turned back into the parlor. "Bess, dear, I must run over to Holden's a moment. Will you not go up to Winifred? She is not lying down at all."

Followed by the sergeant, Berrien entered Holden's gate and gave a whack at the open hall door as he passed in. Rolfe's voice was the first thing he heard. It was tremulous with excitement.

"If Colonel Farquhar will but give me authority to search one room in this post, I will guarantee that I can find that picture and name the thief——" He broke off short at sight of Berrien. Holden rose, hospitably urging the major to join them in a cup of coffee, but Berrien proceeded at once to business.

"Major Kenyon, a sergeant of my battalion is in charge of the fire-apparatus here, but is most anxious to go with us. He says it will be allowed if you can name one of your men—a non-commissioned officer—to take his place at once. You will do me a very great favor if you will."

"Certainly I can," answered Kenyon, stoutly. "Is your man there? Call him in. Sergeant Griggs, of B company, will be just the man, and I know his company commander will make no objection."

"Come in here, sergeant," called Berrien, and, cap in hand, the dark-eyed, dark-haired trooper, on whose lip the moustache was again beginning to bristle, stood silently before them.

"Are you well enough to go, my man?" spoke up Holden on the instant. "You look very pale, if not ill."

"I am perfectly well, doctor, and I am eager to go. I suppose I'm a little cold and excited."

"Then give my compliments to the quartermaster at once and say Sergeant Griggs, of the infantry, will take your duty," said Kenyon, quietly.

Ellis muttered, "Thank you, sir," faced about, and hurried from the room.

"Was that man in the hall when I was talking and you came in?" asked Rolfe, in his quick, decided way.

"I don't know," answered Berrien, surprised. "I think he followed me up the steps and was standing at the door."

"Why do you ask, Rolfe?" queried Holden, closely studying his face.

"Because, if he was, the search I spoke of would now be useless."

VII.

Daylight at last, but the sun is hidden in banks of dripping mist. Daylight, wan and chill and comfortless, and the bleary lamps still smoke and flicker about the parade. Daylight, yet without one spark of gladness. Even the birds huddle in the shelter of the autumn foliage, now so crisp and brown, and not so much as a chirp is heard. All around the big quadrangle night-lamps are still aglow within the shaded windows, telling of sleepless vigil, of pallid cheeks and tear-dimmed eyes. Only in the barracks of the men or the lively dens of the bachelor subalterns do the windows blaze, uncurtained, undismayed. There no silently-weeping wives, no clinging, sobbing little ones, crying "because mamma cries," yet little dreaming for what cause, no thought of "What will come to these should I never return?" daunt the spirit of the soldier. There all voices are ringing with eagerness, even exultation, as the men brace on their woven cartridge-belts and toss over their brawny shoulders carbine-slings and the straps of canteen and haversack, and then come streaming forth upon the galleries, muffled to the chin in the blue cavalry overcoats. Out on the parade the trumpeters are gathered under the moist folds of the flag, awaiting the signal to sound "assembly;" and now the band comes marching in through the morning mist, and the adjutant strides forth from the office door. Merrily, briskly the stirring peal bursts from the bells of the brazen trumpets. Promptly the blue overcoats leap into ranks. Sharply they face to the left, and the stern voices of the sergeants can be heard calling the rolls,—the "here," "here," of the men responding in animation and hilarity sometimes so marked as to call forth a frown of rebuke. The troop commanders and their subalterns have hastened to their company grounds. The major has just come forth from his dimly-lighted hall and is joined by the colonel at the gate, and now, slowly, these two are pacing out to the parade. On many of the verandas dim feminine forms, mantled in heavy shawl or cloak, have gathered in the gloom. Some can be seen flitting ghost-like through the mist, seeking comfort and sympathy in the society of a near neighbor equally bereaved. Brewster turns one longing glance at the porch of the major's quarters, but no one is there. Again, quick and spirited as though defying the elements, the trumpets peal the adjutant's call; the band bursts into the martial rhythm of lively quickstep, and then the dripping, moisture-laden morning air rings with the words of command, as, in full ranks, the four troops come swinging out upon the turf and all the roadway around the parade fills up with other light blue overcoats, those of troopers and footmen who wish with all their hearts it was their turn to go, that they, too, belonged to the first battalion. In a moment the line is formed; the carbines snap into the bared left hands as arms are presented; Berrien leaves the colonel's side and takes post in front of the centre, touches his cap in acknowledgment of the salute, and whips out his own battle-worn blade. No speech-making here. "Right forward, fours right!" rings the order, and then, arms at right shoulder, band and trumpeters leading, Berrien's men, with quick, elastic step, with swing and life and jauntiness in every stride, march square away across the parade, heading for the road in front of Farquhar's quarters. The trumpets strike up their merry, lively peal. With one simultaneous crash the carbines are brought to the carry, and Berrien lowers his sabre in salute to the gray-haired colonel, whose eyes fill and who bares for the moment his handsome head as he notes the spirited bearing of the men. And now the head of column has reached the road and turns to the left; and now the trumpets cease and the full band bursts into martial song, and all along the row women are waving handkerchiefs wet with tears, even though many are sobbing as though their hearts would break, and little children are perched on the gallery railings, shouting in shrill treble their good-by to papa, who turns one brief glance, perhaps the very last on earth, and a big lump rises in many a husky throat, and stern eyes are dimmed with unwonted tears, and God alone knows the secret thoughts that go surging through the soldier brain, the never-ceasing whisper of that still, small voice, "What—what will be their fate if I am taken?" God alone can hear, God alone can know the humility, the piteous pleading, in the muttered prayer that floats to Him on high, "Oh, guard and protect them, and, if it be thy will, in thy good time restore the father to his helpless little ones." Ah, it is one thing to go forth

to fight for an imperilled country, for an insulted flag, to stake life and fortune and hope to guard the beloved ones at the fireside, and to feel that one is battling for them, for their honor, peace, and future prosperity. But it is a thing far different to be torn from loving arms and the smiles and sunshine in the little faces, the prattling and kisses of baby lips, to face year after year a savage foe, knowing full well that, defeated, only death can be the soldier's fortune, that, victorious, the only reward will be permission to slink back to the station whence one came. It is the conquered Indian who rides in triumph to the nation's capital and learns how great and good a thing it is to take the war-path every other year. It is all well enough for the young officers, the young troopers, to laugh and cheer. It is the husband and father among the seniors, the old campaigner in the rank and file,—men who have been through many and many a bloody fight within some twenty years of national peace and prosperity,—men who have seen dozens, hundreds, of their cherished comrades slaughtered in battle with the Sioux,—it is they who see the other side of the picture, and ask, "To what purpose? To what end?" Outbreak has followed outbreak, campaign has succeeded campaign, each marked by bitter losses in many a regiment, each swelling the list of the widowed and the fatherless, each terminated by the final surrender of hostile bands satiated with the summer's slaughter and shrewd enough to know that they have only to wave the white rag of submission to be restored to public confidence and double rations. Step aside now, gentlemen of the army, bury your dead, patch up your wounds, go back to your stations, and get ready for another shindy in the spring. You have had your annual outing, the Indian only his first innings. Now comes his second. Now the Bureau takes hold, and away go the prominent leaders of the red revolt in the annual pilgrimage, the annual starring tour through the East, and the sentimentalists swarm to meet them, and wheresoever they stop hosts of our fellow-citizens throng to smile upon them, eager to clasp and shake the hands that, less than a month ago, were reeking with the blood of mutilated soldiery for whom desolate women and bereaved little ones are wailing hopelessly to-day. *Væ victis!* Go on in your triumphal circuit, red brothers Rain-in-the-Face, Thunder-Bear, Blizzard Hawk. Rejoice in the sunshine of your prosperity; go back to your new lodges and unload your chests of plunder, the free-will offerings of your pale-faced kindred. The war has made you rich. Your squaws and children revel in food and finery galore; and should supplies begin to slacken up a little with the coming of another spring, shoot your agent, carry off his wife and daughters, and start in for another summer of fun. As for you, weeping widow and children of Captain Something,—I've forgotten his name,—shot from ambush by the Sioux last fall, get back to the East as best you can, dry your tears, and be happy on twenty dollars a month. It's what one must expect in marrying into the army.

And now the last of the blue column has passed through the western gate, and a throng of comrades surges after, every man in the garrison, not otherwise on duty, trudging down through the mist and mud to see Berrien's battalion to the waiting train. The guard springs to arms and falls in line,—the guard whom Brewster was to have relieved at eight A.M.,—and again the major lowers his sabre in acknowledgment of their salute, and so, down the winding road, tramp, tramp, steadily, cheerily, even joyously, they go, and the broad parade above is silent and deserted. Women are sobbing in one another's arms, and Mrs. Berrien, seated at an upper window looking out to the west, is stroking Winifred's glossy, rippling tresses,—Winifred, who, kneeling, has buried her tear-stained face in her mother's lap. Fainter and fainter the martial strains come floating up from the wooded valley. The band is playing another quickstep now, its prelude full of vim and life and spirit, and then—— What strange inspiration has possessed the leader? Listen! listen! Winifred raises her head and looks one instant with dilated eyes into her mother's pallid, quivering face; then, covering her ears with her slender hands, burrowing again into her mother's lap, she bursts into a passion of tears. Listen! Sweet, soft, sad, the beautiful notes of the thrice beautiful old song are wafted up on the gentle breeze. God! to how many a breaking heart, how many a world-worn, weary, yearning soul, has it not spoken!—

Love not, love not, ye hapless sons of clay.

It is too much for Mrs. Berrien. Brave, self-controlled, uncomplaining as she has been through it all, this is test beyond her strength. Down comes the window with sudden clash, and then, drawing her daughter to her breast, clasping her in her loving, sheltering arms, the mother heart gives way, the sorrowing wife bows her head, and, rocking to and fro in wordless grief, mingles her tears with those of her beloved child.

Cheer upon cheer comes swelling on the morning air. Cheer follows cheer as Berrien's men return the soul-stirring, soldierly good-by. Guidons wave from the thronging platforms. Bronzed faces peer from every window. Hats and forage-caps are tossing on high. Men rush alongside the slowly-starting train for one last hand-clasp of the departing comrades. The echoes ring to the rollicking notes of their old charging, fighting tune. The trumpets answer from the crowded cars. The sun bursts through the eddying mist and streams in glorious radiance upon the scene. All here at the station throbs with soldier song and spirit and enthusiasm; but above—above, where in mournful premonition one poor army wife is weeping over three little curly heads pillowed in her straining arms, there comes no sound of soldier triumph, no echo of soldier song. Sunshine and stirring music follow the swiftly-speeding train, but all is dark and desolate now where gladness reigned but a day gone by.

VIII.

Letters from the front! What joy and comfort they bring!—for every writer seems bent on convincing the anxious ones at home that there is no danger and little discomfort, after all. Telegrams and brief notes have been raining in ever since the departure of the regiment, but now the two battalions are reunited under Farquhar's command; they have got shaken down into a species of winter cantonment with a goodly number of comrade troops and troopers from the threatened department. The weather has not been unusually severe thus far. Men and horses stood the trip admirably, and nobody growled at stiffened fingers and red noses and benumbed feet as they rode in long column from the railway to the agency, and, now that fuel has been lugged up in abundance and fur caps and "blizzard coats" are coming and the Indians hovering about the camps seem deeply impressed with the numbers and readiness of the white soldiers and all promises well, the letters grow longer and more frequent.

"We are doing first-rate, Bess dear," wrote Berrien, "and all are hopeful that with the surrounding of the big band of hostiles in the Bad River Valley the most uncertain feature of the business is at an end. If they can be quietly herded in to the reservation and induced to give up all their arms and ponies, there will be no further trouble. The health and spirit of the regiment is excellent, and, while I hope no emergency will arise, I can bet that if there should be a shindy the Twelfth will give good account of itself. Farquhar keeps us on the alert, and there is no rusting. Gorham has joined from leave: so that Brewster, to his infinite disgust I doubt not, has had to fall back to second place. He and Rolfe are about the only gloomy spirits in the command, and of Brewster I see very little. Ever since the episode of which I told you and her most significant appearance at the dépôt in town while we were being switched to the north-bound track I have not felt like having anything to do with him. How do you suppose she heard of our move, since she left the hop before any one knew of it? There were a few other ladies there, I admit, for they were still with us when the orders came, and it had cleared by the time we reached the dépôt. She, however, seemed to hang on to him, and nobody else, to the very last. I am distressed at what you tell me about Winifred, and the more I think of it the more I am disposed to urge your instant acceptance of Miss Guthrie's invitation. It will be the very best antidote I know of,—a few weeks in St. Louis society,—if she has indeed, as you fear, become interested in him. Go by all means; it will do you good,—do Winifred a world of good (get her some new gowns, and take in all the parties and all the gayety you possibly can); and it will be a good thing for Miss Guthrie, too.

"Now, this is strictly *entre nous*. Holden is worried about her, and in course of a long talk we had last night he showed me a letter just received

from Mrs. Holden. Of course she is all upset by his having to take the field, and wants to leave the children with her mother and come up here to him, but she couldn't be in camp, and there isn't a room to be had at the railway-station. The place is just crammed with newspaper men and quarter-master's people. Mrs. Holden writes that ever since the night of that queer adventure of hers at the fort, Nita has been unlike herself,—strange, nervous, almost hysterical at times. She will permit no allusion to it, and seems striving to forget it all. She goes everywhere, morning, noon, and night, but looks haggard and ill. I gather from what Holden said that, as you once surmised, there was an old affair which may have had something to do with her persistent refusal of every offer; but what that could have had to do with her fright at Pawnee I cannot imagine. Holden agrees with me, however, that it would be a capital thing if you and Winnie would pay her the visit she urges: so again I say, go by all means.

"By the way, I wish you would run over and see Mrs. Thorpe as often as you can. Her letters have a depressing effect on the captain. He tells me the only insurance he has in all the world is in the Army Mutual; but three thousand dollars would hardly pay their debts and take care of them for a year, if anything were to happen to him. Don't be alarmed by newspaper stories of the lighted skies and howling ghost-dancers. Indians will dance all night on any provocation, and our fires light the skies quite as much as theirs. Sergeant Ellis, who volunteered to push through with despatches to Buller's command somewhere on the other side of the Bad Lands, got back all right this morning, and says he had hardly any difficulty in working a way through the hostiles. That fellow, I think, is going to make a name for himself in this campaign. He is always ready for anything that turns up.

"I hear that Brewster and Ridgeway have had a row and do not speak. Some of the boys know what it's all about, but won't tell me. Do you know? Now, unless you wire to the contrary, I shall address my next care of Hon. Warren L. Guthrie, St. Louis."

Then Kenyon got a letter. He was now commanding officer of the post, and was unremitting in his thoughtfulness and attention to the households of the absent officers. It was Rolfe who wrote to him, and Kenyon was well-nigh at his wits' end in the endeavor to conjecture what it all meant:

"You remember my saying I could find that stolen picture if I could but have authority to search one room at the post. It is my conviction still that the man who goes by the name of Ellis was the thief. He had a lock-box at the post-office in town, No. 23, and letters have been forwarded to him here by the postmaster two of which were not addressed to Sergeant Ellis or to G. B. Ellis, Twelfth Cavalry, but to Ralph Erroll, Box 23. When he returned from detached service this morning the sergeant-major handed him his mail and asked him if those additional letters were his. He turned red, then pale, but said yes. Both these were from Louisville, as I happen to know; both were addressed in the same hand,—that of an educated woman; and there is no doubt in my mind that this Ellis, or Erroll, has a screw loose in his record. Brewster knows something of his past, but refuses to tell. It is of vital importance to me to find out who and what he is, for I believe him to have been guilty of a crime beside which the theft of that picture is as nothing.

"Now, I want you to do something for me. A man will call on you within a few days, presenting a letter of introduction from me. He is a detective from Chicago. He has certain inquiries to make at the post and in town before going to Louisville, and it should not be known that he is a detective at all. Give him every facility in your power. Introduce him to the postmaster as a friend of mine, if you prefer it, and let him occupy my quarters while at the garrison. He will want to see the fire-house and apparatus and all about Holden's quarters. Kathleen is there in charge, and Holden has no objection, though he pooh-poohs the efforts I am making to get at the bottom of this strange business. I hope I am not asking too much of you.

"I saw Hearn last evening, just in from a ten days' scout with Lane's squadron over towards the Wakpa Shicha. He asked after you and sent cordial regards. There are two other fellows here who were on their honey-moon tour when their regiments were ordered to the field. It reconciles one to being a bachelor, almost."

The major put the letter down and pondered long, perplexed and annoyed. He had known Rolfe but a short time, and had learned to know him mainly through Holden. He knew him to be resolute, positive, even aggressive at times. He admired his soldierly qualities and respected his ability. But when finally he rose from his desk after stowing that letter away, old Kenyon expressed himself about as follows: "That fellow *needs* a wife; he is too much accustomed to having his own way. I'll be hanged if I'll do any detective work for him or anybody else. If Holden wants his house searched, Holden can say so."

Two days later the major had the mournful pleasure of escorting Mrs. and Miss Berrien to the train, and as it steamed away eastward a man who had stepped from the day car as Kenyon placed his fair charges on the sleeper came forward and handed him a note addressed in Rolfe's characteristic hand.

"I know who you are," said Kenyon. "You will find me at my office in the garrison when you get up there." And, stepping into the waiting wagon, he bade the driver go ahead, leaving the detective to come up in the post stage.

That evening he wrote a short letter to Rolfe, and the gentleman from Chicago indited a long one,—both of which would have served to surprise that calmly superior soldier not a little had they reached him in due course of mail, which, however, they did not. It was some time before he saw them at all, for when they were unloaded from the mail-bags at the wintry cantonment, Rolfe, with Berrien's battalion, was miles away.

Getting no reply to his missives and little encouragement at the post, the strange civilian suddenly departed, after three days' apparently aimless stay, and the next heard of him was in the shape of a letter from Louisville. Could Major Kenyon procure for him, anyhow, anywhere, a photograph of Sergeant Ellis? No, Major Kenyon couldn't, and was very short in saying so.

And now December was come, and the air was crisp and keen in the valley of the Pawnee, the sunshine radiant and sparkling; but far to the north the wintry winds were howling about the flimsy cantonment and whirling the snow through every cranny and crack, and the long nights on outpost and picket were bitter cold. But, through it all, the various battalions of horse were sent scouting in turn around the reservation, and more and more the young warriors dribbled away from the agencies and were next heard of welcomed with acclamations by the savage hosts in the fastnesses of the Bad Lands, and every hour increased the prospect of sharp fighting in the near future. But all the letters to the anxious hearts at home were full of hope and cheer, full of prophecy that everything would soon be settled. The renegade bands were all "located" and being slowly hemmed in. The Twelfth would eat its Christmas dinner at Pawnee after all, they hoped. And in St. Louis Miss Guthrie was exerting herself to see that her charming guests were having the loveliest kind of a time. Dinners, luncheons, card-, theatre-, and dancing-parties followed in quick succession. The new gowns were being made as fast as famous modistes could evolve and construct them, and Winifred was rushed from one scene of gayety to another.

"Nothing could have been more charming than our welcome," wrote Mrs. Berrien to her beloved Dick, "nothing more delightful than the round of entertainments to which we are bidden. One has hardly time to think. As for writing, this is the first opportunity I have enjoyed in three days, and we are home from the theatre but half an hour. Mrs. Holden comes over every day, and we exchange such news as we have of the dear old regiment and the dearer ones who are our especial property. She is what I call a *genuine* woman, and I like her more and more. I must tell you something I learned through her. The day after our arrival we were in the library, and my attention was attracted by a large portrait, apparently a crayon copy of a photograph, that hung over the mantel. It was of a singularly handsome young man, and I knew at once he must be a Guthrie. 'It is my brother,' said Nita, in such a sad, constrained tone, 'taken just a few weeks before his death six years ago.' Of course I could ask no more, but Winifred and I both noted how utterly her face changed, how unspeakably distressed a look came into her eyes. We could see then why Mrs. Holden should have said she was haggard and ill; and yesterday Mrs.

Holden told me something of his story. He was barely twenty-two, the idol of the family, and immensely popular in society. He was assistant cashier in one of the big banks here, and one day the sudden discovery was made that in some mysterious way quite a large sum was missing, money for which he was responsible, but he could not account for it, neither could anybody else. The matter was investigated thoroughly. They had detectives everywhere, and absolutely nothing could be brought up against young Guthrie. He never gambled, never dissipated in any way, was a model son and brother. Nita was wild with indignation at his having been even suspected. Mr. Guthrie offered to make good the sum twice over if need be and to bond himself for all his wealth to establish his boy's honor, and for three or four days all was excitement, and then, in the midst of it, poor Jack was found dead in his room, a half-empty bottle of chloral by his bedside. The world said suicide, guilty conscience, etc., but Nita and others knew that he had not slept a wink since the discovery of the loss and was crazed with misery. They have always maintained it was an accidental overdose. But it nearly broke Mr. Guthrie's heart, and it was three years before Nita would go into society in St. Louis again. They went to Europe, and stayed there ever so long.

"What makes it seem probable that he was unjustly suspected was that the bank dismissed its cashier, Jack's most intimate friend, a man two years older than himself, and a devoted admirer of Nita's. It was even supposed that she was engaged to him. He had no wealthy friends to stand up for him, and Jack's death made it appear as though there had been guilt; and yet such a sum could not well have been made away with except by the knowledge or collusion of the cashier himself, and, though proofs were lacking, he was discharged the very day poor Jack was buried. No one knows what ever became of him afterwards, and people settled down into the belief that this Mr. Worden was the real thief. But now comes the strangest part of it all. The president of the bank was a widower who for two years had been a suitor of Nita's, a persistent suitor despite her marked coldness and aversion. Four months ago rumors began to float as to the stability of the bank; then came a run, a panic; the bank had to close its doors; immediate investigation into its affairs was made, and then came the discovery that the president had been a heavy speculator and had unquestionably used the funds of the bank to cover his losses. They found his body in the river four days afterwards, floating down by the old barracks where you and I had such a happy winter twenty years ago. People say now that it was President Percival himself all the time, and that he threw suspicion on young Guthrie because he knew the father would eagerly pay any sum to cover the loss and hide the shame, but Jack's death balked the scheme.

"Do you wonder now that Nita is sometimes overwrought and nervous? Poor girl! who knows what she has suffered? Who, to see her in society, would dream that she had ever suffered at all? Do you suppose Captain Rolfe did not hear all about this when he was here on recruiting service?

"Now you ask me to tell you everything about Winifred. Is she happy? Is she getting over her disappointment? I do not know just what to say. She is always bright and apparently joyous in society; always grateful for every kindness and attention shown her; but she is rarely alone one minute from morning until late at night, and I cannot be sure. She never speaks of him; and in all the whirl of social gayety here, and the attention she receives on every side, I think, I hope, she may forget her girlish sentiment. Time will show."

Time might have shown, but time was not accorded. Coming home late one night from a delightful dance, their carriage stopped outside the massive *porte-cochère* of the Guthrie homestead instead of driving right in.

"What is it, James?" asked Miss Guthrie.

"Another carriage here, miss. I think it's Mrs. Holden just getting out."

"Jennie here! Why, how odd! She went home half an hour before we started."

It was Jennie, with a grave, anxious face, at sight of which Mrs. Berrien fairly sprang from the carriage.

"You have ill news, Mrs. Holden. What is it? Tell me at once."

"This has just come from my husband," was the trembling answer as she held forth a telegram: "Major Berrien's wound serious, but not fatal. Mrs. Berrien must not be alarmed. Do not believe sensational newspaper reports of disaster. Wounded doing well."

IX.

Pursuant to his orders, Major Berrien with his battalion of the Twelfth had been scouting the open country that lay to the northeastward of the cantonment. So alarming had the situation become, so significant if not actually defiant was the manner of the Indians whose lodges were pitched all over the prairie around the agency, that the commanding general had caused intrenchments to be thrown up on every ridge overlooking that threatened settlement. Additional troops, including a strong force of infantry and detachments of light artillery, had been sent to the scene. Hotchkiss and field guns were placed in position commanding the Indian camp, and night and day the earth-works were heavily manned and sentries and outposts guarded every approach. Meantime, the main body of the hostiles was still ghost-dancing and howling through the wintry night far over to the north among the breaks and chasms of the Bad Lands, so strong in numbers and so secure from assault within the lines of their natural fortress as to laugh to scorn all premonition of disaster. Runners had gone to every tribe urging concerted action and united revolt. Every day brought new accessions, and all that was needed to enable them to bid defiance to the encircling force was the arrival of the great bands that had broken away from the reservations along the Missouri, followers and would-be avengers of the old chieftain Sitting Bull, who had died in harness, a rebel to the last. Brulé and Ogallalla, Uncpapa and Minneconjou, here were the warriors, reinforced by many a new-grown son, who had fought the white soldiers summer after summer, time and again, in the bloody days of the decade past,—the Brulés especially, once restrained by the wisdom of old Sintogaliska, now ripe for any deviltry and well-nigh unanimous for war to the knife.

Without noteworthy incident, Berrien's command had circled around to the east of the sacred lines of the reservation, had spent a day or two exploring the breaks and ravines of a dozen little streams flowing into the Wakpa Washtay, had located trail after trail of travois-, pony-, and lodge-pole-tracks, had scoured the wide valley of the main stream, but without sight of a single warrior, much less a war-party. The still smoking ruins of two ranches told, however, of recent visitation, and the hoof-marks of cattle mingling with the pony-tracks pointed unerringly whither the spoil had been driven. Meantime, while nothing could be seen of the wily red man, every hour gave new proof that their own movements were closely observed. Signal-smokes went puffing skyward on almost every side, and the night sentries declared that twice just before dawn of two successive mornings they had dimly seen shadowy horsemen darting over the neighboring ridges and had heard the thud of nimble hoofs. Even in the faded gray of the bunch-grass, even on the hard, frozen ground, experienced eyes could find corroboration of the story. Daring Indian scouts were ever on their flanks and front and rear, making no overt move against them, but keeping the hostile camp fully informed of everything that was being done and watching restlessly for opportunity to cut off every straying charger, to cut down every straggling man. Knowing all this full well, Berrien had given strict orders,—neither officer nor trooper was permitted to leave the column by day nor the bivouac by night; and now, its mission accomplished, the column had started on return march, and up to this time no casualty had occurred. So long as the isolated battalion was moving towards the hostile camp, nearing every hour the overwhelming array of the enemy and separating itself farther and farther from friendly supports, no bar had been put to its progress. But now the Indian scouts could see that it was turning back, probably in the hope of regaining the cantonment unmolested.

It was a sunshiny December afternoon; the air was as clear as a bell, the clouds that obscured the eastern sky at dawn had long since drifted out

of sight, and in all its broad expanse the pale-blue vault of the heavens wore not so much as a feather of vapor. Who that rode in the laughing, chatting, jaunty column that sparkling day could realize the change a few hours might effect on the silent, breezeless solitudes around them? At noon the sun was so warm that many a trooper had stripped off his heavy overcoat and turned up the flaps of the rough fur cap. Except in deep ravines or *coulées*, hardly any snow was to be seen. The dull gray surface of the rolling prairie, wave after wave, lay basking, and the leafless branches of the cottonwoods overhanging the frozen pools were glistening, sparkling, in the life-giving rays. The advance-guard, after breaking the ice and treating their horses to a mouthful of water at the stream, had moved on at brisk trot, and now the stalwart riders were spreading out in extended order as they breasted the slope. Out to the west, full five hundred yards, the wary flankers could be seen, some crossing the stream farther down the valley, while other comrades peered over the barren ridge behind, that no sneaking foe might crawl up unobserved and send a long-range bullet from its shelter down into the swarm of troopers at the ford. So, too, the flankers to the east and the sturdy little knot of rear-guardsmen just popping up over the divide so recently crossed, all told of ceaseless vigilance on every side. Berrien has not ridden the Sioux trail a score of years for nothing. He takes no chances where the security of his command is concerned, and has small opinion of the leader who subjects them to needless risk.

And now one after another the four troops ride into close column on the northward bank; the men dismount, unsaddle, and presently, with side-lines in hand, each trooper leading his faithful steed, the four herds are guided to the separate grazing-grounds already chosen and "pre-empted" by wide-awake subalterns or sergeants. There the side-lines are carefully adjusted, the bridles slipped off, three or four men remain in saddle as herd-guard, and the horses are left to graze. Rich with nutriment is that crisp, dry bunch-grass,—rich and plentiful. The mules of the pack-train bray with impatience to shed their loads and join their envied four-footed comrades; but presently they too, following the bell, are streaming out upon the guarded prairie, rolling in luxury upon the frosty earth and kicking their legs in air in genuine delight. From a dozen little fires among the bare-limbed cottonwoods the thin smoke is curling aloft, and the rattle of tin cup and plate and the jovial voices of the men seem to clamor for their soldier rations. In long rows the saddles and equipments are aligned upon the turf, each man's carbine and belt at his saddle. Huge rolls of robes and blankets are unstrapped and spread to air, and all this time, while the troop-officers are looking to the comfort and security of their horses, Major Berrien, followed by a single orderly, is riding about from point to point to satisfy himself that the guards are stationed where best they can secure the bivouac against surprise.

The ridge to the southwest is higher than those which limit the view at other points, and thither Berrien is now riding at easy lope. Rolfe and Hazlett, watching him for a moment, exchange an appreciative nod as they hear from the group of soldiers at the nearest camp-fire some brawny son of the old sod remark, "Just luck at the ould man now; sure it's a smart red-skin that will ever get through the pickets he posts." Not since the days of old "Major Slowtrot," old "Pap" Thomas, has there been a battalion commander better loved by the rank and file. They know nothing will ever induce him to forget one precaution for their safety, and reward his care with a loyalty of devotion good to see. Watching him still further, Hazlett notes that a distant vedette has signalled, and that Berrien, slowly now, is riding up the slope to join him. A sergeant has some question to ask at the moment, and when Hazlett again looks out to the southwest, major, orderly, and vedette have disappeared from view around a little shoulder of bluff. Other vedettes can be seen at their posts on all sides, and a few dismounted sentries lying prone where, unseen themselves, they can scan the country to their front. But Hazlett's curiosity is excited by the fact that two men, mere specks in the distance, are huddling together at the crest half a mile away to the southwest and evidently watching something out at their front and motioning to the sergeant back with the supports. Presently this trooper, too, trots out to join them. Berrien and his party are still out of sight from camp.

"Captain, may I borrow your field-glasses?" asks Mr. Brewster, swing-

ing up to the fire where Hazlett stands. "I have lent mine to the sergeant of the guard."

"Did you see where the major went?" asks Hazlett by way of reply, as he hands the desired instrument.

"I last saw him at the point yonder. He rode around it with Sergeant Ellis and a couple of men, and that vedette must have been calling to him. It seems to me they've been gone some time: so Gorham says I can ride out and find out what it means."

"I'd go with you, Brewster, but my horse is out at herd. Take the glasses with you, anyhow." Brewster's big black is led up at the moment, and the lieutenant quickly mounts and canters easily away.

Meantime, old Berrien, who has noted the signals of the vedette referred to, has joined him, with the brief inquiry, "What is it, Scott?"

"Why, sir, I was posted here by the sergeant, and he had no sooner gone than I saw what I took to be horsemen in the valley several miles out yonder to the southwest. The major can see the whole country from a butte that lies perhaps three hundred yards farther out beyond this ridge. But here comes the sergeant back, sir."

It is Ellis, cantering briskly from the advanced position Scott has designated, and coming to them now around the shoulder of the bluff a little to the right. That Ellis has seen something is evident: his face shows it in an instant.

"An Indian war-party, major, perhaps a dozen, rode from behind a long ridge over to the west and down into the valley of what I take to be a branch of the Porcupine. That butte hides a good deal of the valley; but we can see it from there, though."

"You three men come with me," says Berrien, quietly. "We must look into this."

Two minutes' lope brings them to the butte Ellis has pointed out. Leaving their horses with the orderly, Berrien, the sergeant, and the sentinel go crouching up the hither slope, throw themselves on the ground, and crawl to the summit. As the vedette has said, the whole country for miles in every direction can be seen,—a country of bold contours, of bare, rounded bluffs and buttes, of deep, shadowy ravines and gulches,—a country bare of trees save the ghostly, leafless cottonwoods perched by the banks of many a frozen stream. Miles and miles to the north and northwest the wild Indian land spreads before their eyes. Close at hand, tumbling, billowy, and abrupt, the ridges follow or intercept one another in rapid succession. The face of the land is cut up into tortuous "breaks," the deep, narrow beds of countless little streams, all winding tributary to the river that flows placidly away to the northeast in the broad valley from which the column marched at dawn. Beyond that, west of north, clearly, sharply defined in the distance, already alternating glaring surface and ghostly shade under the slanting rays of the westering sun, a tumbling mass of jagged, fantastic shapes, a tangle of vertical cliffs and seamed and furrowed walls, a labyrinth of gorges, gullies, washed-out channels, deep black crevices, and broad, yawning, impassable gulfs, the storied Bad Lands of Dakota, shunned by all except the renegade and outlaw in the past, now habitable only by the Indian. Beyond these, faint and dim in the distance, the snow-covered, pine-crested summits in the Black Hills. All the rest of the surface, east, west, and south, a frozen sea of gray, glinting here and there in the declining rays; and there off to the southwest, perhaps five miles away, lies the valley into which the party of dusky warriors has galloped so short a time before,—the valley beyond which, a long, long day's march away, stands the guarded camp of comrade soldiery awaiting their return. Berrien studies the scene long and carefully through his glasses. Intermediate ridges are not many, but they are sharp and clearly defined.

"Who was it reported that the advance saw signal-smokes south of us at noon?" he asks.

"Corporal Waite, sir; he and two of the men saw them plainly, and they seemed to be answered off here." And Ellis points miles away to the west.

Berrien ponders a moment.

"Where away would you locate the agency, sergeant, if you were going to take a bee-line for it?"

"Out off here, sir."

"And they crossed that line going into the valley?"

"They certainly did, sir, and—— Look, major! look yonder! Another band, and from exactly the same place."

A little bevy of dark objects darts suddenly into view from behind a curtain-like divide and goes skimming over a level stretch towards the low lands of the valley. Berrien's glasses seem glued to his eyes.

"Twenty of them in that party! What do they see? What's their hurry? They would not expose themselves to our view unless there were urgent need for haste."

"The old road comes in from that direction, sir," answers Ellis. "We left it a few hours out from the cantonment, as you remember. Can anything have been seen along that road to give rise to signal-smokes?"

Berrien turns half over and looks keenly into the sergeant's intelligent face.

"That road has been abandoned for weeks past. Everybody to the east of us has taken refuge at the railway long since. Nobody would be coming from that direction."

"I know that, sir; but would not any detachment coming from the agency to meet us, for instance, be apt to keep the road? I understood we were to strike for it in the morning and follow it in."

Again Berrien gazes long and earnestly through the binocular. "They are certainly heading for that road and riding at full speed. How many men have you at this front?" he quickly asks.

"Just eight, sir, all told, but eight more are almost within over on our left flank. Yonder is the ridge where my men are posted." And Ellis points to their left rear where lies the low crest.

"Just keep a good lookout here, sergeant. I will move them over this way, and then ride to the left flank.—My horse, orderly." And, thinking deeply over the matter as he rides, Berrien spurs into a lively canter across an intervening dip in the prairie. "Some mischief ahead," he mutters, "They are not speeding up that valley for nothing. We may have to saddle and get over there."

Not two hundred yards has he ridden when from the point which he has just quitted there comes a sudden yell of warning, followed almost instantly by two shots in quick succession. Then bang! bang! another two, and, as he whirls about, the first object that meets his startled gaze is Ellis's handsome black horse plunging to earth almost at the edge of a shallow ravine some distance out in front of the butte.

"My God, sir," cries the orderly, 'Sergeant Ellis is killed!"

Berrien's heart bounds. There, face downward upon the sward, motionless, just a few feet away from the plunging, death-stricken horse, lies the sergeant, his carbine dropped from his nerveless hand. At the same instant, red, glittering, bedaubed with paint, bespangled with cheap finery, two young Indian braves lash their ponies into furious gallop as they shoot up out of the shallow ravine, and, rifles in hand, coup-sticks advanced, race madly towards the stricken trooper in eager effort to secure the trophy of their prowess, the coveted scalp of the fallen foe.

"Your carbine, man!" yells Berrien to his orderly. "Quick! shoot that leader!" And putting spurs to his snorting horse, reckless of the fact that he is armed only with revolver and that the ravine may be full of Indians, the veteran soldier drives full tilt at the charging braves. He thinks only of the fact that one of his men lies prostrate and helpless before them. They are almost upon Ellis before Berrien has galloped a rod. They are within twenty paces of him when, with a shout of delight, the major sees him whirl suddenly over, grasp his carbine, and, all in a second, the flame leaps from the bronzed muzzle, the foremost warrior drops his rifle, whirls up a clinching, convulsive hand, and topples headforemost out of the saddle. Scott, the vedette, echoes with another shot that kicks up the dust close under the second pony's flashing heels. Its red rider veers in broad circle to the right, and in the twinkling of an eye the feathered war-bonnet bows low over the pony's stretching neck; Berrien's bullet whizzes harmlessly above, and the major himself, borne by the rush of his half-maddened steed, dashes on past Ellis, now kneeling for another shot, and so goes crash into the midst of a little knot of yelling warriors just bounding up out of the gully to the rescue of their stricken comrade. "Bess, my wife; Winnie," are the only words he has time or thought to mutter, for instant death seems

inevitable. But all the old fighting instinct is uppermost, and almost in the face of the foremost Sioux his revolver blazes its challenge, and horse and pony meet in tremendous shock, and the lighter steed goes tumbling and rolling over the turf. There is chorus of yells, shots, soldier cheers, thundering hoofs. There is a vision of glittering steel in front of his eyes, of hideous, painted face, a sudden sense of stumble and stunning fall, a shrill whoop of triumph, changing instantly into the death-cry, and while his Brule antagonist goes crashing down, pony and all, Berrien is conscious of the superb leap of a big black charger over his own prostrate form, of a stentorian cheer from half a dozen trooper throats, and the next minute Brewster is kneeling by his side, raising the honored gray head in his strong young arms, and the voice that thundered in battle-cry but an instant agone is trembling now as he calls for a canteen of water and bids his half-stunned commander not to strive to move.

"We've got two of them, sir, all right," he whispers, breathless, but well knowing that to be the best news he can give. "The rest got away and left a bullet-hole in your shoulder."

X.

"Since you ask me, sir, I most distinctly oppose its being referred to Major Berrien. He is doing well, but the excitement might bring on fever —and disaster."

It was Dr. Holden who spoke—and very firmly spoke—to Colonel Farquhar four days after the little fight beyond the Porcupine. The colonel sat with bowed head, grave and thoughtful. Before him stood his surgeon, respectful but most earnest in manner. Beside him on the narrow field-bed sat Rolfe, with face of gloom,—three or four letters and a telegram in his gauntleted hand. Already the wintry twilight was settling down; the wind, that had been moaning through the flimsy shelter for the last hour, was now whistling in gathering wrath and flapping every loose rag of canvas about the crowded cantonment. Mules and horses at the picket-lines with one accord were turning tail to the black northwest and pawing the hard and frozen ground in nervous disquiet. The orderly who suddenly stepped within the tent was followed by a few whirling flakes of snow, and the first match he struck in the effort to light the colonel's field-lamp was puffed out in a twinkling.

"Give my compliments to Mr. Brewster and ask him to step here," said the colonel, after a moment's silence; and the orderly vanished.

In the camp of the Twelfth, where Berrien was universally beloved, three names had been on every lip since the battalion's return,—those of the gallant major himself, of Lieutenant Brewster, and of Sergeant Ellis. Painfully shot and stunned and bruised though he was, Berrien's wits had never left him. He was positive that the rush of war-parties towards the old road portended mischief, and, despite the lateness of the hour, he ordered the battalion to saddle at once and march to the Porcupine. From the abandoned lodge-poles found along the banks experienced hands had quickly lashed together a comfortable litter. Between these improvised shafts two of the most sedate of the elderly pack-mules were harnessed fore and aft. A bed of robes and blankets was hung midway, and, while Rolfe and Hazlett pushed ahead, scouting every ridge and ravine with their keen-eyed skirmishers, Gorham and Thorpe followed, escorting their beloved chief. Just as was anticipated, at nightfall the distant flash and report of rifles proved that the hostiles were busily at work in some deviltry or other, and, launching forward at the gallop, Rolfe's long line swooped down into the valley in time to send the yelling circle of mounted warriors whirling away into the ravines beyond the stream, and to rescue a little squad of scouts and troopers, a mere handful, who had ventured forth with despatches for Berrien's command and were fighting for life behind their slaughtered horses. Two were already sorely wounded, and all would doubtless have lost their scalps, but for the veteran major's clear judgment and the sense of duty that triumphed over physical pain.

"The ould man's clear grit all through," said his invariable eulogists, the troopers. But there would have been no dear old man left to them, as

Ellis and Scott had borne testimony, had it not been for Brewster's daring charge into the midst of the red warriors. It was his bullet that laid low the savage brandisher of the knife just as he would have gashed the brave old major's throat; but "White Wolf" had counted his last coup, and, stripped of his finery, lay stiffening on the prairie, a painted corpse, awaiting funeral honors at the hands of his howling comrades. Every soldier's heart rejoiced that it was Brewster who saved the major's life, for Brewster, of all the subalterns, was first favorite among the rank and file. And as for Ellis, though he was too exclusive—"too much like as though he wanted to be an officer"—to be generally popular among the men, he had always commanded their respect, and his unexpected prowess on this occasion won their genuine admiration. What nerve the fellow had, to be sure, to lie there "playing possum" just as though he were stone-dead and ripe for scalping, and so tempt his assailants out from the cover of the ravine, and then never stir until they were so close he simply *couldn't* miss, and so "got in his deadly work." Brewster and Ellis were the major's avengers, the two troopers who had dealt out death to the foe, and who were therefore, from the soldier point of view, the men most entitled to the honors of the day.

And yet, at the very moment when every other man in the regiment was lauding their names and congratulating them upon their deserved laurels, one captain, Rolfe, was practically demanding at the hands of his colonel that they should be stripped of their high estate and sent to the rear in arrest.

As Dr. Holden stood there listening to the accusations and arguments brought forward by Captain Rolfe, he could not but recall the remarks that, in one form or other, had occasionally been brought to his ears at Rolfe's expense. Even so conservative and loyal a fellow as Warren, the adjutant, had once summarized his character in forcible terms: "I respect his ability," said he, "but damn his egotism. Rolfe in this regiment is just like the one juror who said that they could long ago have agreed on conviction but for the eleven blooming idiots who held out for acquittal." Rolfe was a man of such intensity of opinion and purpose that, once having made up his own mind as to what somebody else ought to do, he deemed it not only a right but a duty to instruct the other party, no matter what that party's rank or station might be; and this was practically what Rolfe had been doing to his colonel ever since Holden appeared upon the scene. Personally Holden had never met Rolfe before the arrival of the regiment at Pawnee, but, except a certain dogmatism of manner in discussions over points in tactics, politics, law, or whist, he had decidedly liked everything about him, and told the youngsters as much when he found that they did not.

"Any man with half an eye can see that Rolfe wants to make the very best kind of an impression on Dr. and Mrs. Holden," said Randolph. "They are Miss Guthrie's nearest friends and relatives,—at least the nearest whom he knows." But Holden also liked Brewster, liked him well, and could not believe all that Rolfe was so strenuously urging upon the colonel: first, that Ellis was a thief and an outcast, and, second, that Brewster had known it all along and concealed it. The more positively and unflinchingly Rolfe asserted himself, the more did Holden resent it.

Finally Rolfe had burst out with,—

"Well, Colonel Farquhar, I'm acting in this manner for the honor of the regiment to which I've been attached through thick and thin for nearly a quarter of a century. I heard you were just sending forward a report highly commending these two men, and I believed it my duty to inform you of their character. As you seem reluctant to accept my statements, I request as a matter of justice to me that you refer my report to Major Berrien at once, and he will corroborate my opinion."

Then and not till then did Farquhar firmly and almost sternly call his subordinate to order, and when Rolfe had been reduced to enforced silence the colonel turned to Holden, and Holden had given prompt voice to his utter objection to their disturbing the wounded major with any such matter. "But I will send for Mr. Brewster, Captain Rolfe, and question him in your presence," said Farquhar. And Brewster, who had just been enjoying a hearty hand-shake and pleasant words with several officers of the Eleventh who, despite the rising gale, had ridden over to congratulate him,

went blithely and briskly to answer the colonel's summons. Warren had given him "the tip" as to the letter being prepared for Farquhar's signature. It was a joy to know that his name was to be sent forward with the praise of his soldierly and honored chief. It was almost rapture to conjecture what Winifred Berrien would think of him when she heard that his vigilance and dash had saved her father's life.

He looked, therefore, the very picture of stalwart, soldierly, brave-eyed manhood as he stepped quickly into the colonel's tent and stood erect before the silent trio there assembled. He came with a heart beating high with anticipation; but one glance at Rolfe's sombre and half-averted face, the first words in Farquhar's grave though courteous tones, banished all pleasurable thought and put him on his guard.

"Mr. Brewster, if I remember aright, it was you who presented Sergeant Ellis for enlistment when we were in the Hills. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"You knew him before his joining us, did you not?"

"A short time, sir; yes."

"Where had you known him, and how long?"

"At Deadwood, sir; I met him there on two occasions before he decided to enlist."

"Two occasions? And how long before he came to us?"

"Perhaps a week, sir."

"And you had never known him or of him before?"

"I had seen him, but I cannot say that I had ever known him."

"Mr. Brewster," burst in Captain Rolfe at this juncture before he could be checked, "do you mean to tell me you were not well acquainted with this so-called Ellis long before you met him in the Hills?"

"Captain Rolfe," was the instant answer, and the flush leaped to Brewster's cheeks, an angry light to his eyes, "I mean to tell you nothing whatever. I am answering Colonel Farquhar."

"Permit me to conduct this matter, Captain Rolfe," said Farquhar, stretching forth a restraining hand and checking the captain as he rose with another question on his lips. Rolfe, with almost any other man, might possibly have persisted. He knew Farquhar, however, and knew that however gentle and courteous might be his manner he could come down hard upon those who crossed him. So, with evident effort, he held his tongue, but remained standing. "Be good enough to resume your seat, captain," continued the colonel, all grave politeness; and Rolfe slowly and reluctantly subsided.

"You went to Helena once some five years ago as witness before a court, and the train was held up by road-agents, Mr. Brewster. Did you not meet this man about that time?"

"Yes, colonel, I saw him, but I did not know him from Adam."

"You conversed with him, did you not, and were at the same hotel at Helena with him?"

"I did; yes, sir; and I was at the same hotel for thirty-six hours. But he was a total stranger to me. His dress was that of a gentleman, so was his manner, and almost everybody in our car got to talking with him. He was the only one who really saw the train-robbers,—it was all done so quickly, while we were in our berths; but he had got aboard at some station just before the thing occurred."

"Did you not know when he enlisted that he gave an assumed name?"

"No, colonel, I did not. For all I know, Ellis is his own name."

"Yet you knew him as Ralph Erroll at Helena," burst in Rolfe again.

"Captain Rolfe," said the colonel, with marked emphasis, "I will ask you to withdraw; but, except by Dr. Holden's permission, you will not speak of this matter to Major Berrien. I desire to see Mr. Brewster for myself.—No, Holden; you remain."

There was no help for it now, Rolfe had to go; and go he did, without a word. Then Farquhar, in his courteous tones, repeated his question, and received prompt reply:

"He certainly gave his name as Erroll in Helena and as Ellis when he enlisted, colonel, but which is right or that either is right I have no means of knowing."

"Well, I am told that he gave you much of his history and that you lent him money in Deadwood."

"I did lend him, though at the time I thought I was giving him, twenty dollars to pay pressing debts which he had to settle before he could leave there and come to us. He was destitute and starving. He did tell me something of his past, but whether it was true or not I cannot say. The more I see of him the more I believe it; believe he was a gentleman born and bred, and that he had had hard luck, lost home and friends and fortune; that he took to the West and mining; that he made and lost alternately; that now he is reaping some reward for his labor. What I *know* is that he is a tip-top soldier, of whom the whole regiment has reason to be proud, even though I don't know what may be his own name."

Holden was listening eagerly to every word.

"May I ask a question, colonel?"

"Certainly, doctor."

"Brewster, did he ever tell you where his home was,—where his relatives now live?"

"Yes,—Louisville; and I have a packet which, should he be killed or mortally wounded, I have promised to unwrap and express to the address written within. I do not now even know what it is."

"Well, did he never speak of having lived in St. Louis,—having had friends there?"

"Never so much as mentioned the place, doctor."

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the dismal moan of the rising gale, the flap of canvas, and the creak of straining guy-ropes. Farquhar was still thinking deeply. At last he looked up.

"Captain Rolfe has lodged with me very serious charges against Ellis, and bases them on the report of professional detectives. As you know, I gave Ellis permission to ride over to the railway on Gorham's report that he had some important personal matters to look after. Has he returned yet?"

"He had not up to stables, sir, but his pass does not expire until tattoo, and I almost hope he has not started in face of this wind. It looks like a blizzard coming."

"When did Rolfe get these reports, if I may ask?" queried Holden. "I sent a telegram day before yesterday to Mrs. Holden that ought to have reached her that very evening,—it was to forestall any sensational newspaper story about the major's wound,—and I certainly looked for a reply of some kind yesterday."

"The wires are down both east and west, I'm told,—cut by 'friendlies' at the reservation, very probably. No despatch has passed either way since yesterday," answered the colonel. "Rolfe's must have come before that. Possibly we will have later news when the sergeant rides back to-night. I gave him an order to get any telegrams that might have arrived for the regiment. What time does the train get in from the East, do you know, doctor?"

"Somewhere about three, sir; but I fear there will be no mail for us for a day or two. Old hands here say it is madness to face a Dakota blizzard on the open prairie, and some of the officers think we are in for a gale, to say the least."

"Well, Brewster," said the colonel, kindly, "your statement is all that was needed to put an end to any idea that you knew all about Ellis before his enlistment. Of course I shall have to look into Captain Rolfe's charges against him; but say nothing about the matter for the present."

The cavalry trumpet, weird and fitful on the wings of the gale, was sounding first call for retreat as Brewster left the colonel's tent and started down the gentle slope to join his troop. Already the snow-flakes were driving almost horizontally with the biting wind, and, in the rapidly-gathering gloom, the men came huddling from their rude shelters, and, bundled to the ears in their great-coats, stood stamping and swinging their arms, impatient to have roll-call over and done with. The colonel came forth a moment later, and together he and Holden tramped over to the turf-walled structure in which their wounded comrade lay. The air was now so thick with snow that objects a hundred yards distant were blurred, and those beyond entirely obscured. Holden softly unstrapped and raised the canvas flap and poked his fur-capped head within the aperture.

"Sleeping?" he queried of the hospital attendant.

"Sleeping like a baby, sir," whispered the soldier, as he tiptoed to the

entrance. "Captain Hazlett was reading to him over an hour, and then he just dropped away, and the captain left at first call."

"That's capital," said Holden, turning to the chief. "He has worried so over the effect the news might have on his wife that I couldn't get him to sleep. Now, if we can only tide him over until morning, and if this beastly gale will only subside, we'll have good news for him."

"Well, don't let Rolfe get near him," said Farquhar, with a quiet smile. "There isn't a better duty officer in all the Twelfth, but somebody has to suppress him once in a while."

"He ought to be married," laughed Holden in reply.

That night when the trumpets pealed tattoo the musicians braced their backs against the blustering northwest and blew as best they could, though Boreas strove to silence their lustiest effort, and no trooper on the windward side could hear a note. Over the whistle and howl of the gale, far out on the desolate prairie, far to the southeast, however, the stirring, welcoming, hope-reviving strain was borne to the frozen ears of a solitary and well-nigh exhausted trooper, bidding him pluck up courage, rouse himself to renewed effort, and once more plunge forward into the blackness of the night. So long as he kept the gale in his battered face, so long would he be struggling towards comrades and shelter. Staggering, stumbling, sometimes crawling a few paces on hands and knees, sometimes turning his back to the icy blast and gasping for breath, sometimes burying his face in his arms, sometimes stretching those arms aloft to heaven and lifting up a silent prayer for help, for strength, he had struggled on afoot long after abandoning his fallen and crippled horse. No beckoning light, no glimmering star to guide, only the rude buffets of the cruel, pitiless blast, the stinging, biting thrashing of the snow, pelting him like small shot, to point the way, yet savagely to beat him back,—to bid him face and force them, yet furious to overwhelm and down. Weak and exhausted, he had well-nigh abandoned the last vestige of hope, and a wailing cry went moaning aloft from his cracked and frozen lips: "God in heaven guide me; bear me up; give me strength. It is not for myself, but those poor women. God in mercy hear me. God in pity answer."

And over the wrath and fury of the mad hurricane, triumphing above the shriek and howl of the tempest, ringing like the voice of archangel through the vault of the storm-lashed skies, God's answer came. The Divine Pity, riding, indeed, upon the storm, spoke to him in the glad, thrilling, familiar strains of the far-away trumpets of the Twelfth.

XI.

"Who's there?" demanded Brewster from beneath his robes and blankets, as late that night his name was called.

"It is I,—Holden. Tumble up, man; I want you, quick!"

"My God, doctor, is Berrien worse?"

"No, thank heaven, he's sound asleep. Sergeant Ellis was brought in by the guard half an hour ago. He fell exhausted at the lines. We've just brought him to at the hospital tent, and from what I can make out—he's so weak yet—there's something back there out on the prairie, an ambulance and women. I ran over for you as soon as I could; for you probably know him best."

"Be with you in a minute," shouted Brewster, kicking off his moccasins and struggling into his heavy boots. "Lie still, Haddock: you're not wanted," he added. "What time is it, Doc?"

"Long after eleven,—near midnight, I judge. Come as quick as you can. I'll go right back."

In five minutes, in the dim light of the hospital tent, Brewster was bending over Ellis's prostrate form. Others had pulled off his heavy boots and were chafing his half-frozen feet. Holden had just administered another dose of brandy; but at sight of Brewster the languid, half-open eyes began to gleam and the muscles of the lips to twitch.

"Stoop lower, Brewster: he wants to speak to you," said Holden. And Brewster inclined his ear almost to the black moustache.

Then with sudden bound he was on his feet again.

"What!" he cried. "God of heaven, man! do you mean it?" His face was ashen in an instant, but his eyes never quit their questioning gaze. Ellis nodded vehemently, striving again to speak.

"Doctor, do you hear?" cried Brewster, in mad dismay. "He says Mrs. Berrien and Winifred are in the ambulance broken down at Wolf Creek!" And without another word he darted from the tent.

Ten minutes more, a dozen men of the "black troop" were bracing cinch-straps, buckling throat-latches, and loading blankets on their astonished steeds. Despite the howling of the gale, half the camp was up and astir, Farquhar among the first. Brewster had his own horse saddled and was astride before any one else was fairly dressed, and by this time Ellis had recovered sufficiently to speak and tell his story. The train from the East came in on time at three, and he was amazed to see Mrs. Berrien's face. No one dreamed of her coming, for the wires were down. The quartermaster ran to meet her, and the sergeant himself hastened to give her good news of her husband. Nothing would answer, though, but that she must go to him at once. In vain did Major Sterrett plead with her, saying it took five hours to drive over to the cantonment by day, and he feared the evening would be dark and stormy. Go she would; and the quartermaster ordered out his own ambulance and best four-mule team, with his own driver and a couple of armed outriders. He gave the ladies hot tea, loaded in lots of blankets and robes, and they started about three-thirty, were in the teeth of the gale at five o'clock, in pitch darkness and off the road at six, and somewhere about seven the mules became unmanageable in the blizzard, whirled short around, and snapped off the pole. By this time, too, one outrider was lost, the other was frozen half to death and had been drinking whiskey. The driver was so stiff he could hardly move hand or foot, and he and Ellis had the utmost difficulty in cutting loose the mules. There was every prospect of their capsizing the wagon; and they had to get the ladies out until the beasts were free. Then he found they were close to Wolf Creek, more than half-way, and Ellis determined to push on through to the cantonment for help, first replacing the ladies in the covered wagon, wrapping them in furs and blankets and fastening the curtains. The hurricane increased. He and his horse were both blinded, and at last the poor brute stumbled, fell into a ravine, and could barely struggle to his feet. Abandoning his horse, Ellis pushed on afoot, and reached camp he knew not how. He only remembered hearing that distant tattoo.

Farquhar never hesitated. Brewster never asked. Holden made him and each of his men swallow a cup of steaming coffee, and the colonel took it as a matter of course that Curly was the very man to go.

"You have brandy and blankets in plenty?" he asked. "Holden is loading more into the ambulance, and it follows at once. Off with you now."

Impatient even of this brief detention, Brewster led his little band of troopers off into the night. There was not a man in the Twelfth that wouldn't have faced worse things than a blizzard for old Berrien's sake, and as for this it was but a bagatelle. "All we've got to do is scud before the gale, fellers," sung out Murphy, joyously, as they went cantering out of camp and in a second more were lost to sight and hearing. Then came the clatter and rattle of the hospital team, the ambulance, weighed down with robes and blankets and a brace of heavy troopers, despite which ballast the light vehicle was well-nigh whirled over by the force of the gale. And then Farquhar and the doctor had time to turn to Ellis and to think.

"They must have got my despatch Tuesday night and left by the earliest train," said Holden. "How utterly outrageous a proceeding! And yet I might have known it of Mrs. Berrien."

Meantime, there had been dismay at the quartermaster's dépôt. Sterrett, noting the increasing severity of the gale at nightfall, had begun upbraiding himself for having allowed the ladies to persist in the rash attempt. He had done his best to persuade Mrs. Berrien and to assure her that the major was doing well; he pointed out to her that they had nothing but rough shelter of log and turf and canvas at the camp; that there was absolutely no place where delicately nurtured women could be cared for. He offered her and Miss Winifred his own warm, snug, though rudely-furnished room at the station, and ordered his chief clerk to clear out and sleep in the office. He told her how impossible it was for him to leave his post and his

duties of forwarding supplies, and explained that there was no officer to properly escort them. But one by one she had promptly overthrown his objections. Escort? Here was Sergeant Ellis. What better could she ask? As for lack of accommodation at the camp, had she not lived all one winter with her beloved Dick in a Kansas dug-out just the year after their marriage? Had she not camped with him on the Yellowstone?—nursed him in a deserted log hut through the mountain fever in the Big Horn? Were there not women, school-teachers and the agent's and trader's families, there at the agency? What had she to fear for herself or Winifred in the midst of the Twelfth?

"But the regiment is ordered to march to-morrow," said Sterrett. "It is an open secret that the Indians have slipped away from the troops along the Cheyenne, and there's the mischief to pay."

"All the more reason for my being at my husband's side," promptly answered this army heroine. "Dr. Holden will have to go, and Dick will be left practically alone. Winifred and I start at once, even if we have to walk."

Of course that had ended the matter. Against such determination he was powerless. Having first done his best to detain them, he had then bent all his efforts to the duty of transportation, and now at a late hour in the evening and in the energetic and familiar language of the corral was blaspheming the fate that had led him to yield his better judgment to her importunity. Somewhere about nine o'clock one of the outriders had been dragged off his horse, more dead than alive, and told a pitiful tale of having been driven before the storm, and he didn't even know how far they had got before he lost sight of the ambulance entirely, but was sure that one and all they had lost the road and now were adrift on the prairie. This was bad enough; but at ten o'clock or thereabouts the corral-master came in to say that the riderless horse of the other man had just arrived at the gate, and, barely able to stagger, was led inside.

"Pete had a flask along," said the corral-master, sententiously. "That's what's the matter with him."

Then Sterrett could stand it no longer. Soldiers there were none to send, they were all over the range at the cantonment or beyond; civilians were there in plenty, dozens of refugees from the ranches, dozens of railroad-men and train-hands, one or two disgusted correspondents who had got the "tip" as to impending movements all too late to catch the luckier members of that all-pervading fraternity, but who were quick to realize the "scoop" they would have in transmitting to their respective journals full and picturesque details of the Dakota blizzard. It is indeed an ill wind that blows nobody good.

Even though every one told him he could accomplish nothing whatever before daylight, Sterrett had a little party of stalwart frontiersmen duly equipped by midnight and ready to start the instant the gale should show signs of moderating. Hour after hour it shrieked and howled, driving the sheets of snow before it, sweeping the frozen prairie clean as a floor, but whirling dense white clouds into every sheltered gulch and ravine, settling the drifts in the lee of every stack and shed and building at the railway-station, where, "dead" and abandoned, lay the engine of the East-bound train, the passengers huddling for warmth into a single car and cheerfully discussing the propriety of using the other for fire-wood.

And then, before the first faint glimmer of dawn, as though spent with its own violence, the gale began to die. The clouds scudding southeastward drew aside, uncurtaining the placid heavens, where the stars were faintly gleaming and then twinkling out of sight. Soon in a blaze of glory and triumph the sun rose slowly over the far-distant bluffs and looked down upon the scene of wrath and desolation wrought by rude Boreas in the conqueror's absence; and just then, too, there hove in sight a battered little squad of troopers on spent and jaded steeds, and the sergeant in command rode breast-deep into the drift at the south entrance of Sterrett's office and yelled over the intervening shield of snow the stunning question,—

"Did the ladies get back all right? We can't find the ambulance anywhere along the Wolf."

XII.

Before quitting the ambulance and its precious freight, Ellis had made such examination of the neighborhood as was possible in the thick darkness, and discovered that they were close to the edge of a narrow, winding ravine with abruptly-sloping banks, and it was in here that those sagacious mules had sought shelter from the force of the blast. The ambulance was standing on a veritable ridge, exposed to the full fury of the gale, the slope to the rapid-running Wolf just in front, the ravine to the right rear. Shouting to the ladies to fear nothing, he had no difficulty, when aided by the driver, in starting the wheels, and the instant the vehicle was partially turned into the track of the storm it was blown backwards down into the soft bed of snow already thick and deep. Here, under the lee of the banks, the stout wagon was comparatively sheltered, for the top of the canvas cover was just a trifle below the general level of the prairie. The mules, startled from their fancied security by the rattle of wheels and canvas as the ambulance was run down the slope into their midst, seized with one of their unaccountable panics tore blindly away up the farther bank and out upon the storm-swept level beyond. Then in the whirling cloud of snow Ellis had remounted, shouted again a few encouraging words to the ladies within, assuring them he and his sturdy troop-horse would have no difficulty in reaching camp and bringing aid, urging them meantime to keep snugly bundled in their robes, and with Mrs. Berrien's brave voice and cheery "God speed you, sergeant!" ringing in his ears he rode gallantly away, forded the shallow stream at the mouth of the *coulée*, and then, facing the gale, spurred forth upon his perilous mission. The driver and the already somnolent Pete, with what was left of the contents of the depleted flask, crawled into the snow bed beneath the wagon-body, rolled themselves into their joint stock of robes and blankets, and prepared to spend a comfortable night. It was an old story to both.

But, despite all the driver's efforts on the way, the gale had forced them far to the right of the main road and those which paralleled it, the only ones at all familiar to the Twelfth, and when Brewster and his little squad reached the ford, along towards two o'clock in the morning, they sought in vain in every ravine and break,—shouted, fired their carbines, and sounded their trumpet, all to no purpose. Not an answering cry rewarded their efforts. From Ellis's description, Brewster knew that the ladies were so muffled in furs that within their canvas shelter they could hardly suffer greatly from the cold. He was assured that the driver and Pete were with them, also well provided with robes and blankets, and that they were in no immediate danger of freezing; but he could not bear the thought of the long, weary waiting, the dread anxiety, the darkness, isolation in all that howling wilderness. He could picture Winifred nestled in her mother's arms, wondering, wondering, as the hours dragged by, when, if ever, human aid would come to their relief. At four o'clock he and his party had searched and scouted for half a dozen miles up and down the valley. Some of his best and stanchest men were giving out, and these, with Sergeant Brooks, he ordered to push along with the gale and seek news and shelter at the station. Three others he posted near the main crossing of the Wolf, under the lee of a little bluff, where they and their horses speedily stamped a hole in the snow-drifts around the hospital ambulance and huddled for warmth,—fires they could not light, even had there been a vestige of fuel,—and then, with three undaunted campaigners at his back, he had once again turned down-stream, following its wanderings in the darkness and feeling for ravines he could not see along the southern bank. Time and again they dismounted and ran beside their horses to restore circulation to the numbed and stiffened feet and fingers. Time and again they plunged waist-deep into drifts, and the horses floundered to their girths in the powdery snow. At last Brewster noted that here and there far in the northwestern skies the stars were beginning to peep; the clouds were driving away, the dawn was nigh, the hurricane abating. Broader and brighter the daylight stole over the storm-swept prairie, streaked here and there with fleecy, winding veins, and when at last the sun arose in its unclouded splendor the gale had died away to a mere ghost of its furious self, and they rubbed the icy fringe from their battered eyelids and gazed

long and wistfully up and down that shallow, winding valley, all heaped and tumbled with the driven snow, and saw not a sign of those whom they had rushed to save.

Never for an instant did Brewster relax his efforts. Giving each of his men a pull at the flask, he selected little Murphy as about the most compact and certainly the lightest of the trio, and bade him make his way to camp and tell the colonel that up to sunrise no vestige of the lost ones had been found, and suggest that additional parties be sent out at once.

"Tell somebody to bring my field-glass," he added, as Murphy was about to ride away. "If I had dreamed we would have found nothing of the ambulance until this time, I never should have left it. Good luck to you now, corporal. Ride as lively as you can."

Murphy turned promptly away, spurred his unwilling horse through the ice into the black and racing waters of the Wolf, and was presently following a little break in the north side which led by a more gradual ascent to the prairie beyond.

"Now, men, one of you ride back towards the party at the ford; poke into every ravine to your left,—they're all full of snow: it may be the ambulance is so deep in the drift they could hear no sound. If you find anything, the faintest trace, ride up on the prairie and circle your horse to the left.—Morse, you come with me."

"Beg pardon, lieutenant, I think Murphy sees something now," said Morse, indicating the farther shore with a nod of his fur-covered head. Whirling eagerly about, Brewster was surprised to see his little Irishman, a hundred yards or so away, crouching low on his horse's back, still in the ravine and up to his girth in snow, and peering cautiously eastward, his eyes just level with the bank. Then he was plainly seen to signal. In an instant Brewster and his men were plunging into the rapid stream, crushing the ice that skirted the shores and bounding out upon the frozen ground beyond. Again Murphy held forth a hand,—a warning gesture, not a beckoning one. "Keep down, keep down," he signalled; and, wondering, the little party of troopers cautiously followed into the ravine.

"What do you see?" queried Brewster, eager and agitated.

"Upon my soul, sir, I wish I knew; but it's more like Indians than anything I can think of."

"Indians? where away?" And, with a wild fear at heart, Brewster gazed over the bank in the direction indicated.

"Indians, and coming this way, sir, or I'm a tenderfoot," muttered Morse, a man who had served in the Twelfth for many a year.

"What on earth can they be doing so far south of the agency? You don't think any of the hostiles have got down this way?"

"They're all hostiles, sir, when there's only three or four ag'in' them. It don't matter whether these are from the agency or the Bad Lands now, if they can catch a white man a-napping, and something has brought them out here."

"My God, man! you don't suppose they've heard of the ambulance?"

"They hear things quicker than we do, lieutenant. Day or night, calm or storm, those fellows can all around beat us in getting news."

"And they are coming from the northeast, lieutenant," chimed in Murphy. "That means if they are from the villages near the agency they've circled around our people."

Breathless the little party watched the coming dots. The stream bore to the northeast after a deep bend about half a mile away, and on the farther bank, moving nearly parallel with the valley, about a dozen dark objects could be seen moving at rapid lope, the springing, tireless gait of the Indian pony. Ponies they were unquestionably, and each with his rider. Every moment brought them nearer and nearer, until, as they spread out in extended order across the level surface, it was possible to count their number,—eleven; possible to note that every now and then some one of the number in front or on the flanks would rein in suddenly and circle round and stoop, as though examining tracks upon the prairie.

"It is not possible the ambulance can have got so far over as that," muttered Brewster. "It is not possible that they can have heard of it in all that fearful storm. Why, Morse, it's madness to think of it!"

"I don't know how far the team may have been driven out that way, sir, but the blizzard came from the northwest,—from their left front; it beat

across their path all the way, and mules won't face it; and if it isn't the ambulance they're after, what can it be?"

"My God, if we only knew where it was!" groaned Brewster. "Come what may, men, we've got to stand 'twixt it and those scoundrels. Here, Murphy, lively now, slip back down into the valley and ride for all you're worth to the ford and bring those fellows back with you, every man of them. Tell them to keep under the bank and ride like hell. Off with you now." And this time there was no recall: Murphy was out of sight in a flash.

Nearer and nearer rode the savage horsemen, now about a mile away. Already Morse and his silent comrade had swung their carbines out of their leathern buckets, thrust a cartridge in the chamber and loosened others in the woven thimbles. Brewster never for an instant quit his gaze, but his hand had stolen back and loosed the flap of the holster at his hip. The movements of the Indians had puzzled him: they were riding not as though moving on some point already determined, but rather as if searching, feeling their way. Every now and then, too, some of their number cantered to the edge of the bank and seemed to scrutinize the valley.

"Snow-drifts are too deep and plentiful in there, around that bend, sir. That's why they're up on the prairie."

Brewster's heart seemed almost to stand still. All on a sudden the leaders swerved; the blanketed riders could be seen bending low and over as they swung their nimble steeds in circle to the right. And then, then, an instant more, and, tossing the powdery snow all in a fleecy white cloud, there came tearing up out of the depths of some unseen *coulée* a lively herd of Indian ponies rejoicing in their unwonted freedom and determined not to be herded back to slavery without a struggle.

It was hard to repress the shout of joy that sprang to the soldiers' lips. Then it wasn't the ambulance, after all; nothing but this frolicsome band of rascals that, after breaking away from the Indian boys the evening before, had doubtless been driven before the gale, demanding the sending forth of quite a party of the young men in search, even before the storm had fully abated. For a moment the troopers forgot their mission as they watched the chase. Fresh and unhampered by weight of any kind, the scurrying band came sweeping along the edge of the distant bluff, following an active, mischievous leader and leaving their jaded pursuers far behind. The Indian knows too much to chase a running horse; he leaves him to his own devices, well knowing he will more quickly stop when unpursued and can then more readily be headed off and turned back to the ways he should go. On came the nimble herd, full tilt, towards the elbow in the shallow valley where a broad white streak told of deep drifted snow, and there the leader veered to the left and south and would doubtless have stretched away at racing speed on that course, but for one young warrior on a dun-colored pony, who, with the speed of the wind, came darting out across the level surface beyond, gamely, skilfully heading him. Around went the leader once more in wide circle westward, around the southernmost edge of the fleecy drift, and then, with thunder of hoofs, the whole troop went bounding away to the west without a living soul to interpose between them and the bald, rolling heights at the far horizon, miles and miles away.

"Go it, pony! I'm glad to see a redskin done for once!" was Morse's jubilant shout. And then, sudden and sharp, "Good God! What's that? Lieutenant, look!"

Not six hundred yards away now, the little band of ponies, following their spirited leader, had suddenly halted at the very edge of some dip or sink in the prairie that lay to the southeast of the snowy rift in which the troopers were crouching, still hidden, they and their horses, from the sharp eyes of the chasing Indians. Then as suddenly, tossing high their scraggy manes, as though with one accord, the nimble brutes whirled to the south, their leader indulging in a fine flourish of heels as he sped away. And now Morse lay against the bank pointing eagerly to a couple of black objects startlingly outlined on the glistening white of the snow, two objects that came plunging up from the invisible depths of the hollow, struggling breast-deep in the drifts, and at last reached the edge of the prairie, and, followed instantly by another couple, with their long ears erect, with outstretched neck and eager brayings clattered away in pursuit of the herd.

Brewster knew them at a glance,—Sterrett's ambulance mules. Indeed, the broken pole was still dangling between the two in rear and bounding with them over the frozen turf.

And that swerve, that sudden halt and turn to the south end, had cost the band their liberty. Darting along abreast of them, but nearly half a mile away to the south, the warrior on the dun-colored pony had shot far out beyond them, and now, sweeping around in wide circle to his right, rode between them and the broad wastes to the west. Two other Indians were circling in their front, barring the way to the low hills to the south. Others still, straggling far out eastward, reined up so as not to interfere with the "rounding" of the herd, and in a moment or two more these three experts had turned their runaway property in wide sweep back into the shining track of the sun, and in very few minutes the matter was settled; the ponies were sulkily trotting along the bank beyond the bend, headed for home and hard work again, with the ambulance mules braying at their heels. Here the younger Indians, the boys, took charge, and from the distant slopes, from south and east and from the prairie to the west, the others came cantering towards that sharp angle half a mile away and gathered in eager consultation about one who seemed to be their leader.

All this, and much more, Brewster and his men were watching with bounding pulses, in breathless excitement, Brewster with feelings of mingled hope and despair. Now he knew that the ambulance must be somewhere near at hand, possibly up that long ravine on the south side that slanted in from the prairie not a hundred yards away below them. Surely the banks looked as though there were a good ford at that point. Might not that be the very one of which Ellis spoke? Now, if it were but possible to drop back out of the drifts in which they were hiding and recross the stream, they might yet creep unobserved into the mouth of that gully and feel their way afoot until, somewhere in the snow, they came upon, as he now felt sure they must, the storm-bound wagon with its precious contents. From their crouching-place it was impossible to see across the ridge that separated them from the ravine referred to; but to the southeast the prairie lay before them, and the keenest eye could detect no sign of hollow between that which lay so near them and that from which those vagabond mules had emerged far out upon the plain. Somehow, Brewster felt certain that now at last he was actually within pistol-shot of the ambulance, within speaking-distance, almost, of the girl he so fondly loved, whose very life at this instant depended not only on his courage, but also on his judgment. One false move would ruin all.

So long as the Indians kept up their powwow at the bend, so long was Winifred safe. The longer they delayed the nearer would it bring Murphy and the men from the main crossing three miles away up-stream. Then, six to six, he could laugh at the Sioux. But any one who knew Indians at all knew that the discovery of the mules would only set them to work to find the snow camp from which the animals had broken away. Ay, even as these things flashed through his mind, Brewster could see that they were signalling "halt" to the herd-guard, and that two of the youngsters were lashing their ponies out in front of the band and gradually bringing it to a stand-still. Almost at the same moment, too, those in consultation separated, three riding swiftly after the herd, while the other three, slowly and cautiously, began to advance towards the hollow whence the mules had emerged. Evidently they expected to find the white man's wagon there.

"Now is our time, men," muttered Brewster. "Quick! off with your side-lines and double them about your horses' forefeet, so that they can't even hobble out of the drift. Keep them here. Take your lariat and hopple my horse, one of you. Throw him if need be. I'll watch those beggars down-stream. Ah, I thought so," he muttered: "they've grabbed the mules and are examining the harness; that will tell them easily enough they were cut loose after breaking the pole. Quick, men! throw snow by the bushel all over your horses. Roll in it yourselves. Get all the white on you can; then run down the gully as soon as you have your horses hidden, and watch for my signal. The moment I say go, bend double and scamper to the ice yonder, then make for the bluffs. I'll follow instantly."

Meekly the two troop-horses, after having been led to a deeper point down the *coulée*, bent their heads and submitted to the lashing together of

their fore-feet, but Brewster's "Black Jack" was of different mould. He would not yield.

"Over with him, Morse. No time to lose now. Lash him tight, or he'll break away," called Brewster. And poor Jack's plunging availed him nothing. A moment more, with a dismal groan, he was on his side in the soft, cold bed, the lariat was being lashed and knotted so that even furious struggles could not free him, and then, to add to the indignity, his erstwhile friends and comrades were heaping new insult and a storm of snow upon him. Jack couldn't understand it.

"Ready, men! They're just peeping over into the hollow now. The moment they're fairly in it, I give the word."

Twenty—thirty seconds of breathless silence. Then a quick gesture; a quick, low-toned, but imperative "Go!"

Go they did, skimming over the pool above the rapids, leaping the narrow chasm where the black waters, dancing and frothing, had defied the ice king; ducking under the opposite bank; carbines in hand, revolvers at the hip, cartridges gleaming in every belt; and after them, leaping, yet bending low, went Brewster. Another moment, and they reached the mouth of the ravine, burst through the powdery drift, and then, Brewster leading, eyes everywhere, almost on all fours they scurried along half-way up the opposite slope, keeping well under the crest and just at the edge of the deep drifts to their right. Fifty—sixty yards they made their rapid way, and then around a little bend and among great heaps and mounds of glistening, shimmering white there rose an odd-shaped heap, only a trifle higher than its fellows, and from the midst of it there projected a dingy, whity-brown canvas, slanting to the north, and, with a cry of delight half stifled on his lips, Carroll Brewster leaped into the snow, floundered to his armpits in the powdery drift, and in a moment more had forced his way through the fragile white wall before him, had seized the handle of the door, and Winifred Berrien, starting from her mother's clasping arms, blinded for an instant by the glare of radiant sunshine, barely able as yet to rally from the stupor-like slumber into which she had fallen, heard her name called in the joyous tones she knew so well, and saw her lover, a stalwart, glowing, rejoicing young snow-god, all sparkling with the white crystals, all glistening in the glorious beams, gazing upon her with a love-light in his brave blue eyes that brought instant glow to her own wan and pallid cheek. And then, before she could even speak, before her mother could emerge from the enfolding robes, a shout was heard, then the sudden ring of a rifle-shot, followed instantly by another, the spat as of a whip-lash on the canvas top. Something tore its way through roof and front with spiteful "zip."

"Down! down upon the floor! both of you, quick!" shouted Brewster, as he slammed the door, and the next instant they heard the order in his ringing tones, half stifled in the snow, "Fire, men! Keep 'em off! Fire!" They heard the quick bang! bang! of carbines close at hand, the prompt response of rifles distant as were the first, the whistle of lead through the icy air, the shrill yells of battling Indians, the furious gallop of bounding hoofs. Everywhere to their front the rapid fire increased. More yells, partly of triumph, partly summoning additional warriors to the spot, then the muffled beat of coming hoofs, and, in the midst of it all, Brewster's stern voice, calm and steady: "Aim well, men, but fire lively. Don't let them get again so close as to have a shot at the wagon. Watch that above all." Two—three minutes the sound of battle raged about them, increasing at the front. A soldier voice was heard to say, "There's more of them coming, sir. You can see them down there to the east." And Mrs. Berrien's heart grew faint with fear. Winifred had buried her face upon her breast and closed her ears to the horrid sounds. And then, all on a sudden, the yells of the charging Indians seemed to grow fainter, then sounds of dismay arose among them, then the cries were drowned in the clatter of iron-shod hoofs and the chorus of soldier cheers. Murphy and his little squad came whirling up the bank, and Mrs. Berrien's heart poured forth in praise and thanksgiving at the joyous, Milesian hail:

"To hell wid 'em, fellers! Sure all B throop's comin',—not two miles behind!"

XIII.

There was silence and anxiety in the long range of winter camps about the agency. The Twelfth were gone, nobody knew just where; but over to the north, over towards those frowning "Bad Lands,"—all the more wild and treacherous now that the snow had filled every rift and crevice, for the jagged surface was one mass of pitfalls,—other battalions of horse were also gone, and the vigilant watch over those Indians still clustering about their old haunts in the valley was redoubled. The heavier guns of the field-battery commanded the smoky lodges, the lighter pieces were away with the cavalry. The infantry, muffled to their eyebrows, manned the rifle-pits and guard-line and threw their sheltering wings over the deserted camps. For good or for ill, the crisis was at hand. Whatsoever doubt had existed as to the almost universal hostility of the Sioux was banished by the events of the preceding week. The attempted ambush of Sergeant Ellis of Berrien's advance-guard, the attack upon the scouts and couriers at the Porcupine, and, lastly, the affair at the Wolf, in which Brewster a second time had gained distinction, all pointed unerringly to one conclusion: whatsoever might be their assurances to officials high in rank, to agents whose power would be at an end were war to ensue, to self-constituted framers of public opinion, every soldier on the spot knew, and well knew, that the Indians would be peaceable only in presence of a formidable force of blue-coats, but that nothing but ambush and massacre awaited the whites who ventured forth unguarded. Up to this moment, however, of all those gathered at the scene the only troops which had had actual collision with the Sioux were of Berrien's battalion.

Far away south at the Pawnee, old Kenyon had been doing his utmost to still the anxious fears among the families of the absent soldiers. There had been lively excitement when the papers arrived giving sensational details of Berrien's wound and of the affair at the Porcupine, but it was as nothing to that which prevailed over the tidings of the imminent peril in which Mrs. Berrien and Winifred had been placed. That it was just like Mrs. Berrien to insist on joining her wounded husband at once was conceded by all, but opinions differed as to the propriety of her course in taking Winifred with her. This the major decided by prompt assertion that Miss Berrien doubtless refused to be left behind. "And, being a very lovely blending of the characteristics of both her parents," said he, "it would have been decidedly unlike Miss Berrien to have stayed at home."

And then came the dread news that a great band from the northeast, reinforced by a reckless gang of fanatical young ghost-dancers from the Bad Lands, had broken away, and that all the regiments had gone to head them off. Far, without a fight, they could not go. The question was which regiment would be the first to meet them. Then the next night's mail brought the next day's papers, and the Twelfth, having swung loose and being absent from the neighborhood whence were derived the items on which correspondents based their reports and editors their comments, shared the usual fate of the absentee, and, having sustained the only casualties and inflicted the only punishments yet heard of about the agency, was now coming in for its share of the "*toujours tort*" to which it was, of course, justly entitled. Kenyon first glared at and then exploded over a despatch which read somewhat as follows:

"All hope of bloodless solution of the difficulty is now at an end. Even the most peaceably disposed among the reservation Indians are furious over what they do not hesitate to term the slaughter of their clansmen in the three affairs that have recently occurred; and it is an open secret that, at general head-quarters, the gravest annoyance is felt over the total overthrow of carefully-laid plans, all caused by the injudicious conduct of certain hot-headed officers of cavalry. The friends of White Wolf, the principal 'brave' shot by Major Berrien's troopers, declare that he and those with him were friendly and only striving to reach the major with the news that couriers were coming, hoping thereby to earn something to eat, for they were cold and hungry, when they were fired on without warning, and, even while making signals of peace and friendship, White Wolf was slain. Then the Brulés who were with them could not be restrained, and attacked the couriers in revenge. As for the affair at Wolf Creek after the blizzard, there is unspoken denunciation among the Indians, and the

'damnation of faint praise' in other quarters, of the conduct of a cavalry officer present. The Indians declare they had gone out only to gather up their ponies. The sight of the mules told them there must be an ambulance stalled somewhere in the drifts, and they were eagerly searching for it to render succor and aid, when they were fired upon from ambush by the lieutenant and his men, and two of their ponies were killed and one young Indian shot through the leg. The Indians declare they could easily have killed Major Berrien, but merely strove to defend themselves and explain, and that had they been hostile they could have finished the lieutenant and his little squad at the Wolf Creek crossing long before reinforcements came. Altogether, there is something so plausible in their statements that it is understood that the conduct both of the major and at least one of his subalterns will be made the subject of official investigation."

"Well, well, *well!*" said Kenyon. "Thank God *I'm* not serving a grateful nation in the heart of the Indian country. It's bad enough to be shot, and worse to be lied about, and that is all the comfort there is in being a cavalryman, if I do say it who am nothing but a cross-grained old crank of a doughboy. If this is what the Twelfth is to get for 'a mere affair of outposts,' what the devil will be said of them if they should get into a regular pitched battle? Here, Mr. Adjutant, dump that paper in the fire, and don't let a woman at the post know anything about it.—Know it already? How the mischief could they?"

"There were half a dozen of them, sir, at Mrs. Hazlett's reading another copy of that paper as I came down. And poor Mrs. Thorpe is crying her eyes out. She's been utterly upset since the news came that the Twelfth had been sent out. Good God, sir, she's coming in now!"

It was indeed poor Mrs. Thorpe who entered, pallid, her eyelids swollen with weeping. Old Kenyon was on his feet in an instant and leading her to a chair.

"My dear madam, my *dear* madam," he began, "indeed you must not give way so. I assure you there is no cause for such dread and anxiety. Do strive to control yourself."

"I cannot! oh, Major Kenyon, I cannot! I have been through so much, such fearful scenes!" she sobbed, wringing her nervous hands, rocking to and fro in an agony of grief. "Oh, it is easy for those who have not lived the life we had to live in the old days to counsel patience, calmness. I was only a child then, kneeling at my mother's side when the news came in that widowed half the women in the post. I spent my girlhood in the regiment. How many are left of the officers who were so good to me then? Mother was only one of a dozen whose hearts were broken,—broken as, oh, God! I feel mine is to be. They took my father long years ago, now they demand my husband, my babies' father, my all, their all! Oh, God! oh, God!"

Sobbing, rocking to and fro in her uncontrollable grief, the poor girl clung to Kenyon's hand, and the old fellow's eyes blinked and smarted with the tears he could not quite force back. He laid the other hand upon her bowed and swaying head.

"My child," he said, brokenly, "for your babies' sake, try to bear up. Be your father's daughter. I knew and loved him well,—knew you when you rode your first pony at the old fort up the Missouri. You know well I wouldn't try to deceive you. I can't think the Twelfth is to bear the brunt of this business. They don't belong in that department at all. They are only borrowed from here; and surely there are troops enough there, more than enough, to overawe that pestilent gang. All that is necessary will be to surround the Indians, let them see what a force we have, and they'll knuckle down. Don't cry so, Mrs. Thorpe; don't cry, my child. Let me take you over home now. Just get the little ones around you to-night, and I'll bring over some famous oranges that came to-day, and——Why, I don't believe the Twelfth will have to pull another trigger. Think how many other regiments and commands there are there."

"I do, I do, and I pray and pray, but no comfort comes. Did you ever know a time when they were not in the thick of the fight? Did you ever hear of any time when the loss did not fall heaviest on us?"

"Don't think of that now," he pleaded. "Don't borrow trouble from either past or future. Come, let me take you home, there's a good girl. I tell you if that band hasn't surrendered they've scattered all over creation, and

you can no more catch them than you can—than you can—a newspaper lie. That's the strongest simile I can think of. Did you hear what they were saying about Berrien and Brewster?" he queried, eager to divert her thoughts from her own misery.

"I did. Isn't it cruel? But Major Berrien has his wife and Winnie with him, and they're bringing him home; but if poor George is shot, what can I do?"

"Do? Why, you shall go right to him, if I have to give myself a seven days' leave and take you." And so, soothing, comforting as best he knew how, the veteran major led her home to her wondering brood, to the laughing, crowing baby leaping in the nurse's arms, delighted to see the little mother again, to the joyous children romping in the firelight, innocent of care or fear, and then, striving for their sake to still her sobs, to dry her tears, he left her to put the little ones to bed, to clasp their folded hands in hers as the wee, white-gowned girlies knelt at her side, echoing—God only knew with what piteous entreaty—the lisping prayer for His divine protection for the loved father, the devoted husband, the gallant soldier who that very day had fought his last fight and lay lifeless on the frozen sod.

Over the eastward bluffs, cold and hard and gray, the morning light had slowly crept to the zenith. Over the sky was spread one limitless pall of cloud, cheerless and repellent,—a pall so dense that not one friendly star had peeped, not one rift of sunshine now could force its way. All below, bleak, frowning, and sullen, a bare and blasted landscape; low hills and ridges east and west, low-lying shallow and swale between, cheerless, treeless, shrubless, not even a veil of snow to hide its nakedness, to lend one pitying touch to break the dull, dead monotony of its wintry desolation; sweeps and slopes rolling away unbroken to the frowning horizon at the west, sterner, harsher lines among the bluffs across the tortuous stream-bed, between whose ragged banks an icy, lonely, and dismal rivulet is curdling now, spreading out into frozen shallows at the flats, moaning and complaining around its warped and sudden bends, desolate as the surrounding desolation, deserted as the Dead Sea, its banks repellent even to such sharers of Dakota solitudes as the coyote and the cottonwood, shunned of man or beast or tree,—a stream of silence and gloom at the dawn of this December day, and so cheerless is its every surrounding, so appalling the unnatural hush, that one would never dream of life upon its blasted banks.

Yet, listen! Unseen, but dominant, the sun has risen above the eastern hills, and, as the light broadens even where it cannot warm, there floats upon the air from far away at the southwest, faint and clear, a cavalry trumpet call; soft at first, then *crescendo*, it ceases suddenly in shrill high note. It thrills through and through a rare atmosphere unruffled by the fleeting wing of hardiest bird. Like the wistful call of scattered quail, it seems to say, "Where are you?" And prompt, expectant of the coming of faithful mate, listen again! From the dim recesses to the north, somewhere among those bare and desolate slopes, the answer rises, quick, ringing, even imperative, and the signal reads, "This way."

Groping through the bitter darkness of the December night, a cavalry column has sought and, just at the opening of this cheerless December day, has found its mate. The comrade battalions of the Twelfth are within hail.

"Forward!" rings the signal from the southwest. Forward with them, then, around that point at the low bluff to our front, and in the ghostly, gathering light the scene is before us, the tale is almost told.

There, thickly dotting the prairie and covering the low ground, its wigwams smoke-begrimed and dingy, lies an Indian encampment; but even in such shelter as this the hostile horde has fared far better than they who through the long, freezing night have kept watch and ward lest again the wary chief should slip through the meshes. It has come at last. The big warrior's fanatical braves have made their rush, Berrien's men the tackle. Back flew the signal with the setting sun. Up through the night came Farquhar with "the guards."

Here in front the four old troops we know so well have shivered for hours about the village. Here, alert and determined, Rolfe and Hazlett, Thorpe and Gorham, have clung to front, flank, and rear, well knowing that so soon as the colonel got the news he would not only speed the second

battalion on its way, but, gathering any other forces he could find, would ride the long night through, if need were, to join his men.

Stern and silent, Rolfe is standing at the bank of the stream, wearied enough, yet certain that there is no rest before them. On him, as senior, the command has devolved in the absence of the beloved major now being tenderly nursed and comfortably trundled homeward in the warm interior of a Pullman. No excitement, no cheer, attends the coming of the column now at steady, soldierly gait winding into the shallow depression. Rolfe knows that without Farquhar and his reinforcements attack upon or interference with so formidable a band would be worse than desperation. He knows that with Farquhar his own position will be only that of subordinate, and that he must obey. He knows how, were he supreme, a thousand troopers at his back, he would conduct matters now. But Farquhar is a soldier long accustomed both to obedience and to command; Rolfe is one to whom obedience comes with laggard grace, to whom command is opportunity for lavish vent of his imperious will. Orders or no orders, if he had the power he would deal death to the rabid renegades before him. Orders to "bring on the Indians, but not bring on a fight," to his thinking are orders like those which should forbid a man's going to water until he had learned to swim. Orders to disarm but not molest are simply something to be laughed to scorn. When were the Sioux ever known to surrender those precious arms? Such things when reported in years gone by turned out to be as rusty shams as the arms turned in. Rolfe was in mood as sullen as the morn, and the signs about the now bustling village were not to his liking. Over among the tepees blanketed squaws were scurrying about, their shrill voices suppressed, but their black eyes flashing hatred at the silent squads of troopers, carbines ready in hand, watching every move within the guarded lines. Young women and boys were belaboring the gaunt and dejected ponies. Eager gestures and low exclamations called attention to the coming force, and in groups the warriors, shrouded to the very lips in their heavy robes, stood or sat in council; but all the while, darting from point to point, with fierce declamatory gesture went Mephisto himself in the Indian "medicine-man." Mark! wheresoever he goes eager ears are bent to hear his exhortation.

"My God! why can't I arrest him at least? With that old scoundrel done for, the rest might not be so hard," is Rolfe's impatient exclamation.

"Simply because the attempt would lead to instant fight," is Hazlett's cool reply.

"But, man, he's putting them up to organized resistance. He's giving them some instructions now; you can see it just as well as I do."

"Who doesn't? but——" A suggestive shrug of the shoulders indicates the brother captain's opinion. "You know the old saying, Rolfe, 'Ours not to make reply.'"

"Who's in command of those advanced men fronting that part of the village?" asks Rolfe, after a moment's gloomy pause.

"Brewster. Don't you see? He's talking with Sergeant Ellis there now."

Rolfe grinds his heavy boot-heel into the frosted bunch-grass, not more harshly than he grinds his teeth. "By heaven! Hazlett, bear me witness to this,—for there's no telling how things will turn out to-day,—if I had my way those two men would have been brought to book and made to explain, instead of having posts of honor here. Farquhar refused to listen to another word on the subject until we got home again; then it may be too late."

"Well-l, I can't understand what you have against them both,—or either," is Hazlett's reply.

"And I can't explain here or now; but wait till we're home again, Hazlett, if we ever get there."

Farther down to the left two other troop commanders have been watching the symptoms among the swarming lodges.

"There'll be the devil's work this day, Thorpe," says Gorham at last, with gloomy brow.

And Thorpe only bows his head.

Three hours later look upon the scene. The open prairie on the hither side of the village is no longer tenantless, as it was at dawn. Two parallel

lines confront each other there. In dogged submission to the orders of their captors and the mandate of the big white chief which has been laid before them, silent, sullen, muffled to the eyes in dingy robe or blanket, the braves have slowly moved out from their lurking-places among the tepees and shuffled down the gentle slope until well away from the outskirts of their town, and just in front of a long, silent rank of dismounted troopers they squat upon the ground. No word is spoken by either side. Here crouch the savage leaders of the hostile tribe, and, in long-extended line, scores of their fiercest and bravest. Others still lurk among the squaws and lodges. Others peer with glittering, malignant eyes from under heaps of foul-smelling robes or *parfleches*. Those in the outing glance but furtively at the blue line before them. They are silent as the dead, yet the war-cry trembles on their lips. They wait, but wait expectant. They crouch, but it is the tiger's crouch, ready for a spring. The word has been passed that all arms must be surrendered, and every arm is there, ready, hidden, but "with the lightning sleeping in it."

Back among those brown, dingy tepees, breathless with excitement, squaws are scurrying to and fro; children are being huddled away to the farther side. ("Look at that, Curly," mutters Warren, under his frozen moustache, as he passes rapidly along in rear. "Isn't that enough to show they mean mischief?") Some of the Indian police and interpreters are still searching for warriors in hiding. Yet has not the old chief bowed his assent to the orders and given his directions that his people should comply? Nothing must be—can be—done so long as the Indian makes no overt move. The dismounted men of two troops are in long single rank. Some of the men shiver a little, for cold and excitement are telling now, as in many cases overcoats have been thrown aside, but brave men tremble ofttimes until the first shot comes, and then the nervous strain is gone, for the hot blood leaps and tingles through the veins. Back some distance the horse-herders are aligned. Off to the flanks and rear comrade troops gaze silently on the scene. From the crest of a low bluff the black muzzle of the Hotchkiss gun peers from its knot of watchful batterymen. Farquhar, vigilant and grave, has just sent Warren with other orders. A half-breed Indian steps forth, as though to carry its import to the chief. At him the eyes of the old maniac of a medicine-man glare with tigerish fury. He lowers his feathered head. He crouches.

Then, suddenly, a cat-like leap, a wild yell. Off goes every blanket, as though hurled by the explosion from within. In simultaneous crash the flame and lead have leaped upon the trooper line, and now through the veiling smoke every Indian is fighting like a demon. Down goes many a sturdy soldier, veteran sergeant, brave-faced boy. The line reels with the sudden shock, but in an instant men like Thorpe and Brewster and Randolph leap forward among the men and their voices ring with the clamor of battle. Back up the slope, scurrying, stooping low, firing, dropping in their tracks, the Indians are making for the shelter of their tepees,—for the skirts of the squaws. What Sioux woman fears to die in defence of her brave? What Sioux warrior disdains to shield himself from foeman's blow and to shoot from the covert of the sheltering form of his devoted wife?

"For God's sake, men, head 'em off! Don't let them back among the women," is the yell. But Indian tactics, stooping to anything, stopping at nothing, are too much for men trained to fight only as soldiers and gentlemen. Already squaws are rushing forward, knife and revolver in hand. Already the hidden savages are firing from under tent or *travois*. Already a score of the best and bravest of the Twelfth have bit the dust. Curly Brewster's arm is smashed by rifle-bullet; Thorpe, cheering on his men, heading them in their rapid return fire, plunges suddenly to earth with one gasping cry, "Oh, God! My little ones!" Rolfe, riding like mad a dozen yards ahead of his men in wild effort to cut off the backward move, tumbles in senseless heap at the very feet of a knife-wielding fury of a woman who is only laid low just as her clutch is on his hair, her gleaming blade at his throat. Ay, on this bleak and barren and cheerless field, under these leaden skies, beside the black waters, streaked now with curdling red, the battle-fiend is loose: there is, indeed, "the devil's work this day," but where the blame lies as between the soldier who must fight or die, and those who, far and near, East and West, so promptly lashed him as squaw-shooter, babe-slayer, let the God of battles decide.

XIV.

A month later, and Holden has his wounded safely housed under the roof of the hospital at old Pawnee, many severely shattered or suffering great pain. Many will bear to their dying day mementoes of that savage December battle. Some of the twoscore are doing very well; others, perhaps, have done better, and are sleeping under the flag. A busy man is Holden, and a very proud one, as he has the right to be, for, one and all, the troopers love to speak of him as their "fighting sawbones." He was in the thick of it all when the rush of the rearward mounted troops swept into and through those fire-spitting lodges, and the Indians, warriors, squaws, and children, were scattering, fighting fiercely all the way, to the shelter of the ravines among the bluffs. Tireless as ever, he and his assistants are constantly at the bedsides of the wounded. So is the chaplain, one of the church militant, whose "soul's in arms and eager for the fray," for his friends of the Twelfth are under two fires. Gallantly and well have they withstood that which, with sudden treachery at the hands of their savage foes, flashed in their very faces. But they have no redress as against this—this civilized lashing at their very backs. The parson's sermon Sunday morning in answer to the drivelling sentimentality of certain misguided ecclesiastics far from the scene of conflict almost lifted old Kenyon and his comrades out of their seats. The major hugged his chaplain after service and stopped to shake hands with him every time he met him during the afternoon. In many a pulpit east of the Missouri, with tearful fervor was the picture drawn of those helpless, pleading Indian mothers, those shrieking, terrified little Indian babes, ruthlessly slaughtered by a brutal and infuriated soldiery. Nor were the clergy without warrant for their "bottom facts," since in some mysterious way the representatives of the press, hovering about that impersonal section of military anatomy known as head-quarters, were flooding the columns of their journals with paragraphs about the wanton killing of women and children in the fight in front of the Twelfth. "Holy Joe," as the parson had been termed, knew well the day when, in the seclusion and simplicity of his seminary life, he would have swallowed whole just such statements and turned up the whites of his eyes in sympathetic horror at the recital. But the man of God on the banks of the Merrimac and his brother in the cross on the Upper Missouri see very different sides of the vexing Indian question. "Holy Joe" at Pawnee this sparkling month of January was mad clear through at the indignities and aspersions cast upon his blue-coated comrades. He wrestled with the brethren of his cloth and downed them. He even dared to establish a censorship of the press and to keep from the hands of his precious wounded those journals which had assailed the Twelfth.

He had had his hands full, poor fellow, long before the wounded came, for those were dire days and nights after the news was flashed to the post and the widowed and fatherless in their affliction were thrown upon his hands. Poor Mrs. Thorpe! Ah, she was only one of several. There was wailing among the wives and little ones down where once the soldiers' families were so thickly clustered. There were other households in dread anxiety. There were women broken down with grief and sleepless watching. There was one so ill she could not even now be told she would never look upon the face of her gallant soldier again. But draw the veil. It was on such bleeding hearts and on the men who bore the brunt of the fiercest fighting of the campaign that the lash of press and pulpit fell.

But old Kenyon was in his element. To the best and kindliest of men there is in being able to say "Didn't I tell you so?" a joy that surpasses the sweets of religious consolation. It was something to hear him declaiming among the artillery and infantry officers during the days that followed the announcement of official investigation at the expense of the Pawnee battalions. "Why, gentlemen," said he, "I have never ceased to thank God I didn't take the chance for promotion that came in the reorganization twenty years ago. I was one of the senior captains of infantry then. I could have got one of those cavalry vacancies just as well as not,—been a yellow major ten years before the leaves dropped on my shoulders in the blue; but if by any chance I were ordered into the dragoons to-day I'd swap out or quit for good. From the time those Bloods and Piegans got their deserved thrashing at the hands of Tim Baker's battalion I've known enough to steer clear

of it. You know those facts as well as I do. You know those Indians had been murdering, robbing, burning, pillaging, for two years. You know how all Montana begged and implored General Sheridan to put a stop to it. There was no catching them until winter, and then when he sent those Second Cavalry fellows up there with orders to thrash Sheol out of them, what was the result? Didn't the papers East and West turn to and damn him and them? Didn't they dub him 'Piegan Phil' from that time forth? No, sir, no cavalry service for me. There's only one thing harder than the knocks that they have been getting for the last twenty years on the frontier, and that's the knocks they've had to bear at home."

But towards the end of January the old post was beginning to pluck up heart again, and, to the keen delight of Mrs. Berrien and Winifred, their particular major was able to drive with them, bundled up in his furs, and lolling back in the cushions of Berengaria's barouche, as he termed his wife's comfortable carriage, with that rejoicing matron by his side, distributing smiles and sunshine and joyous nods of recognition wherever she went; everybody waving hand or hat or handkerchief as they bowled along, and Winifred—bonny Winifred—beaming upon her father from the front seat. Very, very sweet Miss Berrien was looking just now, said all who saw her; yet there was a shade of wistfulness in her face, a constant expression about those deep, dark eyes that seemed to tell they were ever on watch for one who never came. Shattered as was his sabre arm, Curly Brewster had scoffed at the idea of being sent back to Pawnee.

"What's the use?" he said. "I would be utterly alone there, while here I have all the fellows about me. What better care do I need?"

In the midst of all their trials and annoyances, in the thick of the whirl of events that followed their sharp and sudden fight, the officers and men of the Twelfth found themselves more closely drawn together even than before. Very little was said when outsiders were by as to the depth of feeling aroused in their ranks by the unaccountable criticism of the press. Very little had to be said in the official investigation of the affair to clear them, one and all, of the array of allegations lodged at their doors. But that every man, from the colonel down, bore away from the field of their winter's travail a sense of injury beyond the scar of savage missile, who could doubt?—who could blame? It did not prevent their having some quiet fun of their own, however. Gray-haired Farquhar was whimsical in his sympathy with Rolfe, whose scalp had been saved by the man of all others he had most reviled,—Sergeant Ellis. Randolph, from the recesses of the hospital tent, poked no end of gibes at Ridgeway, who had lost his eye-glasses in the morning fight and had been nearly run off with by the Sioux. As for Rolfe's plight, "he lost all the skin from the side instead of the top of his head," laughed Gorham. It was pitiable enough to make the boys forget the austerity of his past, for to his dying day Rolfe would carry the marks of his involuntary "scrap with a squaw," as Randolph termed it. "Rolfe's scars have come to the surface," chimed in Warren, who never could get along with him. They all hoped he would go back to Pawnee with the wounded train; and he did. So, too, did Ellis, wearing on the arm in a sling the new chevrons of a first sergeant, won, as said his colonel in presenting them, "together with the heartiest recommendation for a medal of honor I could write, for bravery on the field of battle." Rolfe turned his bandaged head away when Holden gave him all the story. He knew not what to think, much less what to say. Ellis had leaped through the swarm of fighting braves and with the butt of his carbine dashed aside the unsexed fiend whose clutching claws were in the captain's hair, and then had fought like a tiger over the prostrate body and saved the life of the man who had maligned him.

"One half-second more, and you were gone, Rolfe," said Holden, gravely.

"I never said he wasn't a fine soldier," answered Rolfe, faintly. "Perhaps I didn't know him aright."

"That isn't all there is to it, Rolfe," was the doctor's reply. "He is more than a soldier. He is a gentleman; and I know it."

Yet when Rolfe expressed a desire to see and speak with Ellis later he calmly begged the doctor to excuse him.

But just why Brewster would not go home with the wounded the boys couldn't quite understand. He would be off duty for months. He might not swing sabre again for a year. Miss Berrien was there, all readiness, no

doubt, to thank him warmly for all he had done to save her and her mother from the blizzard, from the Indians, and heaven knows what all,—to bless him for his rescue of papa,—to beam upon him with those wondrous dark eyes, thought poor Ridgeway, who felt somehow that, after all, his cake was all dough. And yet Curly wouldn't go. What was more, he had never so much as exchanged one word with Winifred Berrien from the moment of the discovery of the ambulance. It was "B throop," as Murphy said, that had the honor of conveying the ladies on to camp and the bedside of the astonished major. It was a blow to Winifred to learn that within twelve hours after their arrival the old battalion had ridden away, Brewster with it.

"I know why Curly doesn't dare go back," said one of the sages of the bachelor mess. "He's afraid Knowles will come out and insist on lugging him off to town to be nursed under his roof, or else of her going out to nurse him. Begad! it may be tough, but it's a heap safer here." And so "Antinoüs" remained with his fellows in the wintry field, and old Berrien, who never could be got to write a letter to anybody, found he could stand it no longer. He bade Berengaria write and say—well, something; something really must be said about how they appreciated his conduct; "by-gones be by-gones;" something, anything; he didn't know; she did: she always knew just what to say. "So write, Bess."

"But I have, Dick."

"Berengaria! And without my consent?"

"Richard Plantagenet, Coeur-de-Lion, Tête-de-Veau, of course,—ten days ago."

"What did you say?"

"Everything that was proper, I trust."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't he answer?"

"How could he, Dick? You can't with two hands; he has but one, the left at that."

"He might have got somebody to write for him. I did."

"So did he."

"Thought you said he didn't say anything."

"Well, he didn't. He said everything that was gentlemanly, courteous, appreciative, and yet—nothing. A model letter, Dick."

"What does Winnie say?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't she see it?"

"Why should she, Dick? Two months ago you practically forbade their meeting."

"Oh, I know; but—I didn't know him then."

"Not even after seven years' service with him, Dick?"

"Oh, well, that—that party in petticoats there in town, I didn't know her as well as—well, as after I heard all about her from those fellows in the Eleventh."

"But I knew her, Dick, from the start."

"I know you did, Bess. You said so; and I suppose I've been an ass," said Berrien, ruefully.

"You sometimes do cross the danger-line, Dick dear. That is, when I let you."

The major had nothing to say in response to this accusation. He pondered in silence a moment. "Well, a fellow can change his mind, can't he, as well as a woman?"

"Not as well as a woman, Dick. Still, he can change. And suppose a certain fellow were to change his mind now and take six months' leave and go away to be cured?"

"What! Brewster change his mind?—about Winnie, do you mean? Why, confound him! I'd round him up so quick——The idea of his going back on Winnie! Why, if I thought such a thing possible I'd have him here on his knees at her feet inside of a week."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, Dick," said she, laughing softly.

"Wouldn't? Why not?"

"Just because two women wouldn't let you,—I for one, Winnie for two."

"You still think she cares for him?"

"I won't answer that, Dick. But this," with sudden change from her laughing manner, "I will say: no matter what she cared or how she suffered, neither you nor I, Dick, nor any one on this wide earth, would ever wring one word from her lips."

And over at Holden's things were going on in an odd groove. It was Kenyon who was a frequent visitor there now, not Rolfe. Mrs. Holden was still in St. Louis with her olive-branches, for the doctor had frankly told her that just so long as he had all these wounded on his hands the children would be in his way.

"He means me," said Jennie to Miss Guthrie, with prompt resentment. "But he says next month he'll come on here,—business will require it as well as pleasure,—pay us a ten days' visit, and take us home. Then you'll come too, won't you, Nita?" But Miss Guthrie shook her head.

"You promised us," said Mrs. Holden, reproachfully; "and Rolfe won't be there to worry you this time," she faltered. "He's going to take a long leave and go abroad."

"But even that," wrote Jennie to her liege, "did not seem to comfort her. She says she will never, probably, visit Pawnee again; and I know well as can be it is all on account of that terrible fright. What can there have been behind it all? Now that the Twelfth are coming home and you have everything running smoothly, don't you think it possible to find out something about that strange affair? You have never written a word, and I can see Nita's eyes questioning me every time she knows I have a letter. The other day I was in her room, and, looking over some old albums that I drew from the bottom of a desk, I came across a picture of hers just like the one that is in the little silver frame on the toilet-table in her room at Pawnee, except that this was blurred and worn. 'Why, Nita!' I cried, unthinkingly, as she entered, 'I thought you told me mine was the only one left of this kind, and here's one that looks as if it might have been worn next some fellow's heart and kissed a million——' and then I stopped short and dropped it, for she had turned white as death and was stretching out her hands. 'Where did you find that?' she whispered at last. 'Between the leaves of this old album,' I said. 'It was lying there loosely.' 'I had not seen it for six years. I thought I had burned it with——' And then she broke off suddenly, and shuddered, but seized it and took it away. If she would only talk to me of Jack; but she will not, even though I know that ever since the suicide of Mr. Percival last August Mr. Guthrie has been working day and night reopening the old matter. All the friends of the Guthries are now more than ever confident that Jack was absolutely innocent,—that Mr. Percival as president of the bank had made away with those missing funds and securities and charged it to Jack and to his friend Harold Worden. An effort has been made to get at Mr. Percival's papers, all of them, but his widow is still so broken that she cannot be seen by any one, say her physicians. It is believed she knows something of the inner history of the whole case, and that she is striving to hide what she knows for her children's sake. Of course people say she has behaved very ill,—that she ought to sell and restore to the bank real estate and property that from time to time Mr. Percival had settled upon her. But she only goes into hysterics when lawyers are mentioned. Mr. Guthrie is now in a highly nervous and excitable state, which naturally reacts upon Nita. I wish we could get her away from here. He went West, you remember, when he left her with us at Pawnee. He went in the hopes of finding some trace of Mr. Worden, so I learn now, and to urge the immediate return to St. Louis of Jack's old and intimate friend to demand justice at the hands of the Percivals, for he was ruined irretrievably by Percival's accusation when dismissed from the bank. But he has vanished utterly, and I know that they have about given him up for dead. A detective agency has been at work for months, and twice of late men have come to the house asking if it were not possible to find somewhere a picture of Mr. Worden; but Nita says none exist that she knows of. I believe that she burned all that she had.

"Why will she not trust me and tell me about it,—she who used to have no secret from me? We know that he was deeply in love with her, and that she was believed to care for him; but there was a fearful scene between him and Mr. Guthrie over poor Jack's body. The old gentleman was wild with grief, and in his misery he upbraided Worden as the cause

of it all,—accused him of being the thief, and cursed him for concealing his crime at the expense of Jack's life and honor. Possibly he did believe it then; but since Percival's death everything is changed. I believe he would give all he owns to make amends to Worden now, and sometimes I think that that is what is killing Nita."

"'That that is what is killing Nita,'" read Holden again, this time half aloud, as he pondered over the words. Then a sound at the door attracted him. He glanced up quickly.

"Oh, come in, sergeant. I did not hear you knock."

"I beg your pardon, sir," was the answer in Ellis's deep voice, a faint flush rising to his pale, black-bearded face. "I knocked twice at the outer door, and then, knowing the doctor to be here, ventured into the hall. Am I too early, sir?"

"You are just in time. Come in. Shut that door and sit down. How's the arm to-day, Ellis?"

Obediently the tall trooper had stepped within and closed the door, but he still remained erect, a shade of hesitation in his manner. "The arm seems doing well, sir."

"And yet you yourself do not pick up as I could wish. Take that chair, Ellis; we shall not be interrupted, and I want to talk with you about your case. You have won honor and troops of friends in this campaign, and when the regiment gets back and they find you pale and languid, so utterly unlike yourself and unfit to take your duties as first sergeant, they will say I was at fault. Can't stand that, you know: so I have spoken to Major Kenyon about the matter, and he has directed that you move out of hospital forthwith and under my roof. No, keep your seat. You are to report to me for special duty in making up the field papers and reports, and I shall need you right here where I can supervise it all and look after you."

For a moment the two men sat gazing straight into each other's eyes. Then again, trembling slightly, Ellis strove to rise.

"Dr. Holden, I—I ought not to take advantage of this. Indeed, I cannot."

"That will do, sir," was the quietly smiling reply. "Orders are orders, sergeant, and, being a patient, you are doubly under mine. What's more, you can ask no question until that chevron is replaced by the shoulder-strap. *Ellis, under what name shall the officers of the Twelfth ask that you be made one of their number?*"

Making no reply, the sergeant bowed his head and covered his face with his hands.

Late that evening old Kenyon, dropping in to see the doctor, found the tall cavalryman seated at a desk in Holden's library, and, as he promptly arose and stood erect in acknowledgment of the presence of the post commander, the major strode straight up to him and held out his hand:

"Sergeant, I am as proud and pleased as your own father could be. When a whole regiment recommends a man for a commission, as this day's mail tells us, it's worth more than all the senatorial backing in Columbia. It may not fetch it, but I'd rather have it. Now, have you any friends to aid you?"

"None in the world, sir."

"No relatives? no kin? Not even a Congressman?"

"Not even a Congressman. A sister, perhaps; but that is all."

"Well, well, well! Never mind, though, my lad; we'll see you through. What you must do is get strong and well. You're but the ghost of yourself, and the doctor and I have moved you over here as a matter we owe the regiment. I thought you were told to go to bed an hour ago. Which is your room?"

"The doctor has given me the run of the top floor, sir, but mine is the front room on this side," answered Ellis, gravely.

"Well, it's time for you to turn in: so I order it. Let me see. This is the 25th of January. A month from now, or two at most, I hope to see you with a strap on your shoulder, and long before that with the flush of health in your cheek. Now good-night to you, and pleasant dreams." And the major strode away.

Only an hour after sunset the silver disk of the moon had risen cloudless and unveiled, and now, as the bugle was calling the belated ones back

to the post for night inspection of quarters, the burnished shield was high aloft, flooding the broad valley with its radiant sheen, throwing black shadows upon the broad road-way, the white picket-fence, the glistening verandas at the post. Holden, returning from a late visit to some of his patients at the hospital, stopped and looked quickly and intently up at the little gallery overhanging the eastward wall. In the front room, that which he had assigned to Ellis, a light burned dimly. The venetian window of the rear room leading to the gallery was dark, yet open, and on the little ledge, leaning against the casement, the moonlight gleaming on his face and form, a tall soldier was gazing intently eastward. Quietly Holden strode along, entered the gate, went noiselessly into the hall and up the stairs. The door from Nita's room to the landing stood wide open. At this juncture a person standing outside would have seen the silent occupant of "Robbers' Roost" turn with sudden start and peer into the room, for Holden, his eyes fixed upon the gleaming, glistening space between the two rear windows and just over the toilet table, had purposely dropped his heavy stick with resounding clatter upon the landing floor. "I thought so," he muttered, in serene satisfaction. Then, picking up his stick, he calmly strolled across the threshold and into the dark room.

"Beautiful view of a moonlight night, Ellis. That was Miss Guthrie's favorite perch when she was here."

XV.

A great city is draped in mourning. On every side, at half-staff, the national flag hangs limp and lifeless in the moist and misty air, as though of its own volition drooping in honor of the soldier dead. Under the sodden skies, through thronged yet silent streets, in long, long column chosen detachments of soldiery are leading to its final resting-place the shrouded clay of him who to such glorious purpose had led the Union blue in every field from the Mississippi to the sea, and who through long years of honored service ranked foremost on the rolls of the army,—foremost, perhaps, in the great heart of the people. For days, as though in sympathy with the wide-spread grief, the heavens have poured their floods upon the brown and leafless slopes. All nature seems plunged in wintry gloom. The black smoke from a host of stacks and chimneys has settled down upon the silent city, covering it like a pall. From North and South, from East and West, battalions and batteries, national and State, have been concentrating to take part in the last honors to the illustrious chief, and, dripping, yet disciplined, without the stir of martial music, the men have marched from the trains to the rendezvous assigned them about the town.

At last the hour has come. The weeping skies have checked their tears. The streets and sidewalks along the line of march swarm with citizens whose hushed voices and reverent mien speak eloquently of their sense of the national loss. From many a stately mansion and modest homestead out beyond the business section festoons of black are fluttering in the rising breeze, the flag is twined with crape, the windows, balconies, and steps are alive with spectators. And, far out on the westward avenue, on a sheltered portico that projects from a solid, old-fashioned residence of cut stone and almost overhangs the street, there is gathered a little bevy of fair forms and faces which we saw together for the first time that Indian-summery afternoon of the reception at Pawnee. The rapid trot of orderlies and mounted police, sent ahead to warn the populace off the street and back to the sidewalk, and the distant wailing of cavalry trumpets far down the avenue, have told that now the funeral column is approaching; and from the warmth of the cosey parlor, well wrapped in mantles and furs, the ladies have come forth into the chilly February day,—Mrs. Berrien, Mrs. Holden and her children, Winifred, whose soft cheeks are aglow and whose dark eyes turn instantly, eagerly towards the head of the advancing escort, Nita Guthrie, pallid, languid when unobserved by her guests, yet brightening instantly, bravely, when addressed, and striving to be her old gracious, radiant self for the sake of these and other visitors from Pawnee; for the Twelfth has been detailed especially to lead the escort of the great commander, and all the way from the frontier and only a few days home

from the stirring scenes of its fierce campaign the regiment has been brought hither by the orders of a general who knows their worth as well he knows their wrongs, and whose soldier heart has felt for them in all their trials. It was in his power to give this honor to others, but, though his own old regiment is within easy call, he means that the people shall see for themselves what manner of men are these whom press and pulpit have assailed and against whose fair fame the shafts of slander have been hurled, only to fall blunted and broken, or, like boomerangs, come hurtling back about the ears of the thrower. Vindicated by the verdict of his peers, doubly vindicated by the highest powers of the land, gray-haired Farquhar is chosen to command the escort, and, though the flower of the nation's soldiery marches in the funeral train this day, the eyes of all the gathered throng are strained to see and hail and honor the standard and the guidons of the men who bore the brunt of battle only two short months gone by.

And with the squadrons and the guns from Pawnee came such of the wounded officers as were well enough to be transported hither, and with them half a dozen of the ladies of the garrison. To the huge delight of the old battalion, two of whose troops are cruelly thinned in numbers now, the jovial major is permitted by Dr. Holden to mount "Old Glory" and take his position in front of the line. To the tremulous joy of Winifred Berrien, Mr. Brewster has telegraphed from Washington, whither he was summoned immediately after the close of the investigation at the agency, bidding them bring his horse and equipments, for even though he cannot draw sabre he means to ride with "the black troop" on this day of days. She has not seen him since that wonderful morning when, like a young snow-king, he burst through the fleecy barriers about them and stood before her rejoicing eyes their rescuer, her father's preserver, her lover, her hero; and ever since in his pride he has held aloof from her and all she holds dear. She can hardly hush the fluttering of her heart as now, near at hand, she hears the familiar strains of the trumpets of the Twelfth, still sounding the mournful dead-march. Other ladies of the Twelfth are here,—Mrs. Hazlett, Mrs. Gorham, and Mrs. Warren; and small wonder can there be that their soft eyes fill with tears. Ever since the brief and bloody campaign the sad, solemn tones have been their daily music. The crape is not yet rusting on the sword-hilts of their lords, worn in honor of poor Thorpe and Rand and Burrows, when it is renewed for the general-in-chief.

And now the crowds have drifted back from the asphalt. The platoon of mounted police has slowly clattered by. Then in long rank, boot to boot, muffled in their blue overcoats, the yellow-lined capes turned back, led by their veteran chief and guiding their spirited grays with hardly a touch of rein, the trumpeters of the Twelfth cover the street from curb to curb, the brazen bells uplifted and pouring forth their mournful strains. A little space, and then, mounted on mettlesome bay in the rich housings of a general officer, there rides the marshal of the parade, followed by rank after rank of staff-officers, all in the sombre dark blue of the service. The autumn frosts of a vigorous life have silvered the strands at his temple and tinged with ruddy glow the cheeks of that firm and soldierly face, but the eyes gleam clear and keen as ever they shone a quarter-century ago, when he and Farquhar spurred through the misty forest-aisles about Dinwiddie and led the cheering troopers to the charge on Pickett's crouching line at the Forks. He knows the fair party on the Guthrie balcony at a single glance, and touches the visor of his forage-cap as he moves slowly by, then summons an aide, gives him a low-toned order, and the officer reins aside to let his comrades pass, then jogs back down the avenue to meet the column. And now necks are craning on every side, and a murmur runs along the crowded banquette,—

> A murmur that fain would break forth in a cheer,

but for the solemn occasion of their coming. Eyes gleam and brighten; lips stir with inarticulate greeting; hands, kerchiefs, and hats are waved in voiceless acclaim. Any other time, and all the great city would burst into tumultuous cheer, for here rides gray-haired Farquhar at the head of his staff, and just behind them, commanding the Twelfth, still pallid from his wounds, but erect and soldierly as ever, the senior major, dear old Berrien, lowers his sabre in acknowledgment of the salute of the aide, bends his ear

to listen to the message, glances quickly at the balcony into the smiling face of his wife, meeting Winifred's dark and glowing eyes, but shakes his head, motions to Dr. Holden, who is at his left rear, and ambles on. Holden nods appreciatively on receipt of what seems to be a similar message, reins out of column, followed by his orderly, dismounts at the side street, and presently is standing by his wife's side, welcomed most cordially by Miss Guthrie to the now crowded balcony. In column of platoons stretching from walk to walk, clear across the street, ranks carefully aligned, every man's head and eyes straight to the front, the leading troops of the Twelfth are now clinking steadily by. Hazlett has glanced out of the corners of his eyes at the lovely picture on the gallery, but, riding at attention as they are, and on duty, he makes no sign. Randolph and Ridgeway, heading their platoons, strive to do two things at once,—look as though they saw and appreciated the fluttering greetings of hand and handkerchief and smiling eyes to their right, and still look as though they did not see it at all. The sorrels, the grays, have gone by, the bay troop is passing, and now yonder comes Gorham over on the other side of the street, the nearest he can get to his regulation position of four yards to the left of his leading platoon, and out from the sheltering screen of tree-branches and in front of the centre of the first subdivision of the blacks, his sabre arm still in its sling, his face pale with confinement and suffering, but tall and stalwart, rides Curly.

"Oh, there's Mr. Brewster! Mr. Brewster! Oh, why *doesn't* he look?" cries Miss Guthrie, as the handkerchiefs begin waving furiously, and fair, eager faces press forward in the effort to attract his attention,—all but Winifred, who, though bravely smiling like the rest, is clutching with trembling hands the back of her mother's chair and shrinking behind her mother's form. It is impossible for him not to see the fluttering signals. He half glances towards that thronging gallery, and in a second the light leaps to his eyes, a flush to his pallid cheek. Instinctively his arm twitches in the effort of the hand to reach the cap-visor, and the instant twinge of shooting pain brings him to his senses. He has one brief, fleeting look, however, at the beaming face he loves, and he has just time for a half-gesture with the bridle-hand, a little nod, and then, as on he rides, he feels rather than sees that one sweet face that beamed upon him has suddenly paled, that one graceful form is now staggering back into Holden's waiting and expectant arms. Only two platoons in the black troop to-day, for the others sleep beneath the wintry sod or still languish in the hospital ward. Only two platoons. Brewster heads the first; a tall, dark-eyed, dark-moustached sergeant the second.

"There's Sergeant Ellis!" cries Mrs. Berrien, in her pride and pleasure. "And he's shaved off his beard! Did you ever see him look so young and well?"

But Mrs. Holden, too, has turned, and does not heed. Her watchful eyes, her attentive ears, have other work to do. Obedient to her husband's touch, she has drawn close to his side. It is into her arms and his that, with one quick, gasping, stifled cry, Nita Guthrie has fallen as though stricken by a bolt from heaven. It is by these loving arms the limp and prostrate form is quickly borne within and laid upon the sofa, and Holden whispers to his devoted wife, "It is all clear now."

That night, the long ceremonies of the day concluded, a throng of fair women and brave men are gathered in the parlors and corridor of the great hotel. Down in the marbled court below, some Italian musicians are playing soft, sweet music. Out in the street, under the glare of the electric light, a fine regiment of State troops has drawn up in long-extended line and is standing at ease while its officers are bidding farewell to a host of friends upon the walks below. Here and above are soldiers of all branches of the service, who with the morning's sun will be scattering to their stations again. Some are clustered in the broad vestibules and on the office floor. Others, the juniors mainly, are paying their respects to the wife of the commanding general and to the ladies of the Twelfth, for on the morrow they too, with the regiment, take flight for their prairie home. The hour is late, and several of those present have just come in from a somewhat subdued and quiet entertainment given in their honor at one of the beautiful homes of the city. The solemn nature of the duty that has called them hither precludes the possibility of any general gathering, but the dinner to which the Berriens and others were bidden has lasted so long

that Winifred began to believe it would never end, and Mrs. Berrien has seen all too plainly that, though she strove to appear joyous and appreciative, her daughter longed to leave the scene and return to the hotel, where, as was well known, many of the officers were to spend the evening. Not until nightfall had the Twelfth passed by on its return from the march to the distant cemetery, and as they jogged along at ease one or two of the troop or platoon commanders, in answer to joyous hail from the sidewalk, had reined out of column by old Berrien's permission and dismounted under the portico, but Brewster, smiling, had shaken his head and gone on with his blacks to the muddy cantonment far down at the southern verge. Winifred was already dressed for dinner. She had hastened to her room as soon as they returned from the Guthries', and Mrs. Berrien made no comment. She well understood that the girl's one thought was to be ready to welcome if he should come: there was no telling at what minute he might be announced. And, though they were not to leave the hotel until nearly seven, Winifred was ready at four. The mother heart yearned over her child as she saw how the shadows deepened in her dark eyes when the column went on out of sight in the wintry gloaming, Brewster with it. At that moment she could almost share her husband's idea of bringing the young man to his knees then and there. What business had he playing the indifferent in this utterly unsoldierly fashion? How dare he treat Winifred with coldness? She had done him no wrong. Not since that night of the last hop at Pawnee, the night the marching orders came, had there been opportunity for the girl to speak to him at all. Of course the major had been brusque and repellent, and had virtually forbidden his further attentions; but, heavens, that was not Winifred's doing, and both the major and herself had endeavored to show him, without unnecessary allusion to the matter, that, whatsoever might have been the suspicions or impressions aroused by the singular conduct of that middle-aged married flirt at Pawnee, they no longer entertained the faintest ill opinion of him. Indeed, Mrs. Berrien never had. Blue-blooded herself, her faith in *bon sang* was deep-rooted. She had always liked Brewster, but she was a loyal wife and would in no wise act counter to her husband's wishes. It was now, when Mr. Brewster seemed allowing his pride and resentment to prompt him to this undeserved and cruel wounding of her daughter's heart, that Mrs. Berrien first felt any unkindliness. She could have made him suffer for it, but that she knew it would hurt Winifred as well. Without a word, but just so soon as the last of the yellow cape-linings disappeared from view, Winifred had turned from the parlor and again sought her room. Mrs. Berrien sent a bell-boy for Mr. Randolph, who, having dismounted at the entrance, was standing, the centre of a group of friends, in the marble-floored office below, and Randolph came up with the next trip of the elevator.

"Do you go with us to the dinner at the A——s' to-night, Mr. Randolph?"

"No, Mrs. Berrien; I believe only those who are so fortunate as to be the husbands of certain ladies of the Twelfth are bidden. We are going to have a little gathering here to see Curly off."

"And where does Curly go?—and when?"

"Back to Washington by the first train, Mrs. Berrien. He's been offered a detail at the War Department."

"How delightful that is for Mr. Brewster! Why, the Twelfth is getting some little recognition, after all. Up to this moment the general's welcome home is the only word we've had from a soul. Then you'll all be here to-night, will you?"

"Most of us. Rolfe's here, too," laughed Randolph, "but he sat in a deep window during the procession and doesn't mean to show in public yet. I'm told he wants to make up with Curly before he goes to-night, but Curly won't let him." And Randolph knit his brows. "I wouldn't if I were Brewster. Wouldn't it be odd if they took the same train, though? I suppose he won't care to exhibit that new cheek of his to Miss Guthrie. Will she be here after the dinner?"

"I doubt it, Mr. Randolph. Miss Guthrie is not at all well. She had a sinking-spell of some kind this afternoon during the parade, and has not left her room since. Say to Mr. Brewster for me that we shall hope to see him before he leaves, will you? We'll be back about ten o'clock."

But it is after ten, long after, that now they are gathered in the parlors, and music, laughter, and the sound of merry voices ring through the wide corridors. Winifred, the wistful look gone from her dark eyes, a soft flush on her cheek, is standing near one of the high windows, the centre of a group of ladies and officers among whom at this moment is Brewster, his right arm still in its sling. Though she strives, after her first fluttering welcome, not to glance at him again, just now at least, she cannot quite control her eyes. She cannot but mark with shy delight how her father's broad palm is laid upon her hero's shoulder, as the veteran trooper looks into the younger soldier's face with an expression she is thankful to see. All around the big, stiffly-furnished, formal room, with laughter and with gladness old friends are meeting again for the first time in years,—one at least of the joys of our nomad army life. The buzz of conversation, the remarks of Mr. Ridgeway, who clings to her side, and the sweet, thrilling strains of "Rigoletto," floating up from the rotunda, fall upon listless ears. Winifred is striving to catch his words, for now her mother has joined them, and her cordial, kindly voice mingles with those about her. She cannot hear what is said, except in mere snatches, a word here and there, but she can and does see that, though thoroughly courteous, Brewster is dignified, almost unresponsive. When her father makes some jovial allusion to his narrow escape at the Porcupine and would apparently refer to Brewster's rush to the rescue, the latter seems to wave it aside and turn at once to another subject. Why will he be so—so unlike his old self?

Hark! From the street below the ringing call of the bugle! Randolph pokes his head in through the other window:

"Come out, all of you. Come and see them march away." It is that handsome regiment from the Queen City. And in a trice, men and women, they are pouring out upon the roof of the portico.

"Come along!" shouts old Berrien. "Come along! Let's give 'em a cavalry send-off." And away he goes at the heels of the throng. "Come, Berengaria, you want to see this regiment, I tell you. It's a beauty. And such a band!" But Berengaria holds back an instant.

"Winifred, dear, your wraps are not here, and I fear it is too chilly for you."

"Oh, I'll throw my cape over her," bursts in Ridgeway. "Just the thing!—Come, Miss Berrien.—Where's your cape, Curly? You bring Mrs. Berrien, will you?" And, rejoicing in his finesse, Mr. Ridgeway offers his arm.

"My cape's down-stairs in the office," answers Brewster, shortly.

"Yes, and whatever you do, Brewster, don't you go out in the night air without it," quietly remarks Dr. Holden at this juncture, as he follows the party.

"Orders are orders," laughs Mrs. Berrien. "Sorry for you, Mr. Brewster, but you'll have to see them through our eyes.—Yes, thank you, Mr. Ridgeway," as she possesses herself of that young trooper's arm, "I shall be very glad of your cape." And Ridgeway, with one stupefied backward glance, recovers himself and goes.

Winifred is still standing by the curtained window, half hidden by the projection of the chimney and its marble mantel. Very, very lovely she is in her dinner toilet, a simple gown, clinging in its soft, creamy folds about her slender form, a necklace of rare pearls, a beautiful quaint old heirloom, looped below her fair, rounded throat, its pendant rising and falling rapidly, unevenly now, for her heart is throbbing hard. One moment Brewster hesitates, casts a quick glance around, then steps forward to her side.

"Possibly we can see from this window, Miss Berrien," he says, as he raises the shade. And together they disappear into the curtained alcove.

But they cannot see. This window, like the other, looks upon the roof of the portico, and the backs of their numerous friends are visible, but not the street,—not the departing soldiery in whom such interest is felt. It is chilly here by the cold, glassy barrier. A bright coal fire is blazing in the grate. Both have been warned not to take cold, yet neither seems to think of that fire.

"No, I'm afraid we can't see them here," says Winifred, inanely. "But won't you go and get your cape?"

"I saw them to-day, and I can see them again to-morrow."

"To-morrow? Where?" And now the dark eyes, full of trouble, glance quickly up.

Hear those sounds from below! The shrill voice of the colonel: "Column of fours. Break from the right to march to the left." The inevitable boom, boom, br-r-oom, boom, boom, of the drums. Loud plaudits and cheers from the crowd. Lively applause from the portico. Low voices are indistinguishable here at the window. Brewster pulls down the shade; it may shut out the noise, thin as it is, and, so long as one can't see anything, why have it up?

"Where?" she repeats. "I thought they went East, and that we——" But she gets no further. The pearl pendant is rising and falling like a storm-tossed shallop. Her slender fingers are nervously twisting and untwisting her filmy handkerchief. Tramp, tramp, tramp, echoing the drum-beats, the column of fours is striding away down the applauding thoroughfare. Then, as the band clears the left flank of the line and opens out across the street, joyous, spirited, ringing, it bursts into martial song. Where had she heard that introduction before? Surely there's something familiar. But she has no time to think of that now.

"I supposed—you never cared for—detached service," she falters. "But—is it your wound?"

He shakes his head:

"Three months ago I would not have left the regiment. Now I am better anywhere away from it."

Oh, Curly, Curly! "What fools these mortals be!" You should have sense enough to see how utterly the situation has changed. You ought to know that something more than gratitude has prompted all old Berrien's clumsy efforts at cordiality. You ought to see by Mrs. Berrien's unaffected kindliness that the cloud has been dispelled. Why stand in your own light, a victim to this bumptious pride, striving to persuade yourself that had it not been for the fortunes of war her father would have interposed to-day as sternly and positively as he did before, and she—she would probably have as meekly, tamely submitted as she did that bitter night of parting at the gate? Can you never forgive that unresponsive hand, that half-shrinking, constrained good-by?

He is silent, waiting for her reply. He will not look at her, for her beauty dazzles, almost drives him wild with passionate love and longing. He has worshipped her, adored her as loyal knight might worship his queen of love and beauty. Down in his heart of hearts her image has lived through every instant of the fierce campaign, and reigns there now, rebel against it though he may. Her silence daunts him. If he had thought to pique or trap her into questioning, it was unworthy of his love and her. Her little hands are clasping now. She has started, raised her head, is listening intently. Absorbed only in her, in his love, in his wrongs, Brewster has lost all ear for the thrilling, martial music growing fainter and fainter down the street, but the look in her sweet face startles him. The color has fled. The dark eyes are dilating. One little hand is uplifted, as if to ward off any other sound. Borne on the night wind the strains come full and rich upon the ear. No wonder the girl is silenced, stunned. Oh for the clasping mother's arms now! Oh for the love, the wordless sympathy, that was hers that cold, gray wintry morning when the battalion with its loved ones strode buoyantly away down the winding road at Pawnee! All the heart-breaking sorrow, all the vague, throbbing, quivering pain, come back to her again as now she leans breathless against the casement, listening to the same sad, sweet, tearful old song,—

Love not, love not, ye hapless sons of clay!

One instant only she stands trembling there, then a great sob surges up in her throat, and, burying her face in her hands, she bursts away, she runs she knows not whither. Out into the deserted corridor, along the carpeted aisle, she speeds. Then to her left, wide open, brightly lighted, she spies the elevator, and, with the leap of hunted hare to its form, she springs within. No one there. She tries to shut the sliding door, but now some one *is* there,—Brewster,—and his one arm is too strong for her two. An instant more and he is with her, blessing the fates that had carried off the attendant for a surreptitious look at the departing regiment. With quick

decision Curly pulls the starting-rope, and, when the car has glided softly upward just half-way to the next floor, checks its motion, then springs to her side. Never till that instant had he known the full misery of a crippled and useless arm.

"Winifred, sweet one, listen!" he cries, seizing a slender wrist and striving to draw her hand away, as, sobbing, she crouches in the corner of the cage, while his brave young heart is thumping with a joy and exultation it never knew before. His blue eyes are aflame with love and gladness.

"Listen! Don't cry so! I must tell you."

R-r-r-r-ring! goes the confounded elevator-bell. She springs to her feet, stifling her sobs, conquering her womanly weakness.

"Oh, *do* let me out!" she cries, dashing away the tears.

"I won't," he answers, with such joyous, teasing triumph in his deep tones. "Though a million men a minute ring that bell, I'll never let you go now,—never. You cruel, wicked, heartless girl, you sent me away——"

"Oh, do let me out, Mr. Brewster!" she pleads. "Indeed you must." (R-r-r-r-r-ring.) "There's that awful bell again."

"You sent me away," he calmly continues, while his eyes dance and gleam, "utterly miserable because of your coldness and constraint. You knew I worshipped the very ground you stood upon. You knew I loved you better than anything in the wide world——" (R-r-r-r-r-r- B-r-r-r-r-r-*ring!*)

"I *must* go," she pleads, struggling hard to free the hand he has clasped. "Oh, do, Mr. Brewster!"

"You shall,—you shall, the very instant you have paid toll, Miss Berrien," he laughs, low. (R-r-r-r-r-r- B-r-r-r-r-ring!) "I'll put you out on any floor you wish when you have said just two words."

"Oh, quick! *Do* let me go!" And she makes a frantic lunge at the starting-rope, but too late. His daring arm is round her now. He can use but one, and that has enfolded and drawn her close to his breast. The clatter of the bell is deafening. "Oh, please," she murmurs, struggling in vain, and glancing up in his glorified face.

"Not until you say, 'Yes, Carroll.' Now, quick! Winifred, do you love me, just a little?" No answer. Head bowed again, and now on the only available resting-place. (B-r-r-r- B-r-r-r-r-r- B-r-r-r-r-RING!) "I can't hear," he laughs low and joyously, and the blond head bows until the curling moustache is sweeping her flushed and tear-wet cheek. "Did you speak, Miss Berrien?"

"Yes, Carroll." A mere whisper.

"Louder, please, Miss Berrien." Oh, what eloquence there is in that one clasping arm!

"Oh, *please* let me go! Yes, *yes!* YES!—if I must." And then the bell rattles madly, but unavailingly, and for the instant neither hears. For the instant she can speak no more, for the soft, red lips are sealed.

Two minutes later, as that brightly-lighted car glides down and comes to a stop at the parlor floor, a flushed and wrathful youth confronts the tall cavalryman who calmly steps forth as though on air and holds out a warning hand.

"Young man, if ever I hear of you quitting your post again and allowing a novice to get caught between floors you'll get into trouble. It's lucky for you I'm the only one who can tell anything about it this time." But the wrath is gone, and with bulging eyes the boy glares at the round gold piece in his palm, then at the vanishing lieutenant, and then into the empty car.

Homeward bound! The horses are all aboard. The second battalion has steamed away. Berrien's men from the car windows are answering the cheers of the crowds of citizens assembled to see them off. The ladies, safely ensconced in the cosey interior of the Pullman, are saying adieu to the number of friends, army and civilian, who have accompanied them to the train. The conductor has just reported "All ready, sir," to Major Berrien, who goes back in command, and Winifred, clinging to her mother's side, peers eagerly over the heads of the surrounding throng. Holden signals to his better half to come off, unless she prefers going back to Pawnee without him, and with much laughter and playful effort to keep her aboard, in which the jovial major is most prominent, that popular young matron is finally lifted from the rear platform. Mr. Ridgeway, who has attached him-

self to Miss Berrien's side, becomes suddenly aware that she has disappeared and returned to the interior, also that Curly Brewster, waving a brown telegraph envelope over his head, has shouldered his way into the crowd and is making for the car. "Wants another good-by word, I suppose," growls Ridgeway to himself, in deep disgust, yet comforted with the thought that the train will be off in a moment, leaving Brewster behind. Far forward a bell begins to ring, the steam to hiss; the couplings of the box-cars jerk and strain; the horses snort and stamp in their wooden cages; the motion reaches the rear of the train, and the Pullman leaps forward with sudden start, then settles into slow, gentle glide along the polished rails.

"Tumble off, Brewster!" shouts Ridgeway, in feverish anxiety. "You'll be carried away if you don't."

"Shut up, Ridge," whispers Randolph, unsympathetically. "He's carried away for good. It's you that's left."

"Why, hello! here's Brewster!" booms the major, as he enters the sunshiny car, when at last the crowded station has faded from view. "Thought you were ordered to Washington, lad? Changed your mind, eh?—What, Berengaria?"

"Be quiet, Dick," whispers his smiling wife. "He hasn't changed his mind. Neither has Winifred."

But Holden is not the only one of the Pawnee party who remains. Sergeant Ellis has a furlough to visit Louisville, and is to take the train thither. In his cavalry uniform he was at the station to see his comrades safely started, and the last cheers of the troopers were for him, as he stood with kindling eye and flushing cheek, the centre of a crowd of curious citizens. As the train disappears around the distant curve, Holden touches his shoulder.

"At noon, Ellis?"

"At noon, sir," is the prompt response; and the sergeant recovers himself, and, springing to attention, raises his hand in salute. Holden smiles.

"I fancy that's about the last time you'll be doing that sort of thing," he says, significantly.

"You may rest assured that the impulse will remain, doctor. It is the outward sign of an inward respect that every day has only served to strengthen."

At noon Holden is at the hotel with a carriage, and Ellis, transmogrified, a decidedly distinguished-looking civilian, steps forth from the vestibule and joins the doctor.

"To Warren L. Guthrie's office," is the brief order, and the carriage rolls rapidly away.

"Mrs. Holden is with Miss Guthrie now," says Holden, after a moment's silence. "As yet she is to be told nothing,—as you desire; but should we hear favorably as to the commission before our return to Pawnee——?" he asks, tentatively.

"No, doctor. If we meet again it must be as I was, not what this campaign has made me."

"What you have made yourself, man! Don't talk of it in that way. The Lord made you a gentleman. You made yourself a soldier."

Ellis smiles.

"A gentleman despite night prowling and petty larceny?"

"Well," says Holden, "that's something I leave you to settle with her. It seems you only carried out a fair warning, though of course you had no idea of the ghastly effect it would have. But you never told me how you reached that balcony."

"Easily enough, doctor. I simply took a light rope and grappling-hook from the fire-house, climbed up the rear porch at the end away from where Kathleen and Murphy were, went along the south slope of the main roof to the chimney, slung the rope about it and lowered myself gently to the balcony, then threw off my overcoat and stood at the open window. She had gone, and I thought I was too late, but, catching sight of the very picture whose return she had demanded and which I had sworn to have again as well as to see her, I was just entering, when I heard her step upon the stairs. I did not see her. I do not see how it was possible for her to see me; yet there came that scream of terror and the fall and then the rush. It all flashed over me in an instant that I had been guilty of a mad-

brained prank,—that it would never do to be caught there; it could never be explained. I was up on the roof in a second, snatched away the hook and rope, crouched down to the back porch, waited a moment for Murphy and Kathleen to run inside, then slid to the ground, hid the rope under the wood-pile in the dark cellar, squeezed through a gap in the fence into the captain's yard next door,—they were all over at the Hazletts',—then donned my overcoat and joined the men running up from the laundresses' quarters. Late at night, as the sentry told Captain Rolfe, I went back, ostensibly to get my pipe, and recovered the rope and hook. That was all."

Holden ponders a moment:

"My wife has told me what she knew of your interview with Mr. Guthrie after poor Jack's death; but Miss Guthrie would never speak of what passed between herself and you."

On the pale, clear-cut face the lines of care and sorrow and privation seem to deepen. The shadows darken about the mournful eyes. "I suppose I should never have blamed her as I did," he answers, "but I was mad with grief over Jack, with helpless, hopeless indignation over Percival's accusation; and then, of all others, to have her turn against me as she did,—that was the bitterest cup! Her father's influence in her overwrought condition was what did it, I suppose; but she drove me from her sight as though I were indeed a felon, demanded the return of every line and trinket she had ever given me,—even that prized little *carte de visite* I had carried about me for a year. It was then, when she declared she would never look upon my face again, that I went wild with misery, or despair, I suppose. I swore that sooner or later she should see me, and that before I died her picture would be back here in its old place, and then I left her. God knows, the experiences of the years that followed might have knocked the romantic nonsense out of any man. My poor sister seemed to be the only one who had any faith left in me. I wandered all over the West as Ralph Erroll, mining, 'grub-staking,' working like a dog. I was starving in the Hills when Brewster came to my aid. I couldn't take his money without telling him something of my story, but I gave no names. He doesn't know to-day anything about the old trouble,—doesn't dream that he well knows the people who were once my most cherished friends. It was through him I enlisted, and within three months a mine I had located and yet couldn't sell for a dollar began to pay. By the time we reached Pawnee my half-interest in it proved worth all my years of toil. Then I thought to see her again,—took my furlough at the very time her father was West trying to find me and undo the wrong he had done, and—you know the rest. She was here, and I returned only to learn that she was about to leave and that Captain Rolfe was her accepted lover. Bearded, aged, uniformed as I was, I believed she would not know me even if we were to meet face to face; and believing, more, that no vestige of the regard she once felt for me remained, believing, too, that she was to marry Captain Rolfe, I was bitter, brutal, mad enough to strive to carry out my vow. Twice I had seen her on that balcony on the moonlit evenings, and I determined that the night of her departure she should see me for the last time. You know the rest. I shaved clean, so as to look as much as possible as I did in the old days, wore my civilian dress, and—nearly killed her."

"It was a fearful experiment," says Holden, gravely. "About the maddest thing you could have done."

"I *was* mad, doctor, when I heard she was to marry him. God knows I have realized it daily, hourly, ever since. And, yet, how could she have seen me? She never reached the door."

"Simplest thing in the world. Nothing but the old principle in optics,—the angle of incidence and the angle of reflection. That mirror over the toilet table did the job. I saw you in the moonlight at the balcony window when you couldn't see me in the dark hall, and neither of us could have seen the other had the mirror been away. Now here's Mr. Guthrie's. Mind you, you've got to make amends for that hair-brained performance at Pawnee: so no word of reproach to him. He's old and broken."

Three minutes later the clerk has retired, after ushering Holden and his friend into the private office. The instant the latch has clicked, a gray-haired, sorrow-stricken man, tears standing in his fading eyes, hands

quivering and trembling, totters forward, and might have fallen but for the strong arms that catch and clasp him.

"My boy's friend! my boy's friend,—whom I so wronged!" he falters, and then for a while there is solemn silence.

"Is Mr. Percival's confession complete, and have you seen it?" asks Ellis, gently.

"I have, my boy, at last."

"And it clears me, Mr. Guthrie?"

"Utterly and entirely," the old man cries. "I thank my God I was wrong!—I was wrong!"

One scene more. Pawnee again. The night train has come from the East. Holden's carriage is at the station, and so is Brewster.

"All right?—all arranged?" whispers the doctor, as he springs from the car and grasps the lieutenant's hand.

"All right! Kenyon's just left him," answers Curly, and then busies himself lifting the merry children from the step, welcoming Mrs. Holden, and carefully assisting Nita Guthrie to the platform.

"You happy fellow!" she murmurs. "How can I congratulate you? It's announced, is it not?" And for a moment she seems, despite pallor and fatigue, the old buoyant, radiant Nita.

"Announced?" answers Curly. "My mother-in-law elect—God bless her!—says my face announced it before that elevator could reach the lower floor."

They drive rapidly up the winding road, and, though plainly nervous and excited, the fair guest never loses her presence of mind. She has something appreciative to say as they pass each familiar object,—the lower gate, where the spruce sentry stands at a carry in salute; the guard-house, where the relief is just forming; the broad west gate; the brightly-lighted barracks across the parade; the group of trumpeters in the moonlight out under the tall, glistening flag-staff. Then come the rush of Murphy and Kathleen to open the door and assist them to alight; the rapturous greeting between the children and their Hibernian friends; the fragrance of coffee floating in from the kitchen; the hickory logs snapping and sparkling in the fireplace; the old familiar rooms; the swinging lamp in the hall.

"Welcome to Pawnee once more, Nita," says Holden, clasping both her hands. "We've had enough of pale cheeks and drooping spirits. We've brought you here to recall the roses,—to win you back to joy and health, and to your own old room, Nita. Now, will you promise not to faint this time, no matter what spooks you see?"

She is trembling violently. She looks into his beaming face with eager, questioning, imploring eyes.

"Come, dear," whispers Mrs. Holden. "I'm going up with you."

The doctor summons the children into the dining-room to see the lovely flowers on the table. Mrs. Holden twines her arm about her cousin's waist, and up the stair they slowly go. Nita trembles more and more. They are within a few steps of the landing, and as they come in sight of the open door Nita shrinks closer to her cousin's side. Three steps more, and in the dark chamber there gleams that silvery shield of mirror between the dim white curtains, reflecting the dazzling moonlight from without. They reach the landing, and Miss Guthrie pauses, breathless, unnerved. She can go no farther.

"Nita, it was no ghost you saw," whispers Mrs. Holden. "Shall I call him?"

One instant the blue eyes dilate, wild with hope, incredulity, joy, and fear, all intermingled. Then there is the sound of quick, springing step along the hall. A tall, dark-haired, dark-eyed soldier fairly leaps towards them. Nita turns quickly at the sound, and then with outstretched arms throws herself forward to meet him. No terror, no anguish now, but, as she is clasped to his heart, joy unutterable in her stifled cry, in the one word,—

"Harold!"

THE END.

THE NEWSPAPER-MAN AS A CONFIDANT.

[JOURNALIST SERIES.]

THAT newspapers print all they know, is a popular belief held by nearly every one.

That newspapers print more than they know, is a vulgar belief held by that large and ignorant portion of every community which does not read newspapers to be informed, but to be interested and, if possible, shocked.

That newspapers print all that they hear, is a supposition entertained by the people who bring what they think is news to newspaper-offices.

That newspapers print nothing that they hear from irresponsible sources, without investigation, is the truth, known to all trained newspaper-men. That they do not print all they know, is known also to all trained newspaper-men. That they do not print more than from one-tenth to one-half of what they know, is the truth; and it is known only to one or two men in every newspaper-office, whose business it is to decide whether a "story" is worth "following out," and whether, after "following out," it is proper for publication. Even these men, unless they are of an introspective and retrospective turn of mind, do not realize the enormous quantity of chaff they winnow for the public's daily loaf.

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BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "THE DESERTER," "FROM THE RANKS," "A SOLDIER'S SECRET," "SERGEANT CRŒSUS," "CAPTAIN CLOSE," "A TAME SURRENDER," ETC.

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MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

APRIL, 1897.

RAY'S RECRUIT.

PRELIMINARY.

To Mr. Darcy Hunter Gray.

"MY DEAR BOY,—As foreshadowed in my last, the concern has gone to smash, and your prospects with it. When its affairs are settled, the firm of Hunter, Bloom & Co. will have enough to pay its funeral expenses, and that's about all. What I have left is my wife's, who will, I trust, be able to support me until certain life-insurance policies become due, out of which she can reimburse herself, through my dying, for the cost of my living. I'm too old to try again,—too sad to care much, except for you.

"Your father was my dear friend, your mother my beloved sister. When he died I promised him I would be a father to you. When she died her last words were a plea that I should be good to her boy. I accepted both trusts, Darcy, and—betrayed both.

"They died poor: I was rich. They would have had you learn to carve your own career, and I loved you so that from your bright, brave boyhood you were spoiled and indulged as my own son. I gave you the best I had. I balked you in only one desire, that of going to West Point. Harvard, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, and the Riviera were your educators. I planned to make you a railway magnate, when you hadn't learned the first principles of the business. I've accustomed you to every luxury,—to a life of careless ease, to be a dawdler and a dilettante—isn't that what you call it? I counted on leaving you rich, and I leave you ruined. The self-reproach—the misery which overcomes me as I write these words, no words can tell you.

"I know what you would write and say,—you were always generous; but, Darcy, don't write, don't come,—just yet. Wait until you get—the next news. Wait until——

"However, let us get down to business. Of course you and

Mrs. Hunter will not be apt to see much of each other. She will mourn me less than you; and you more than I deserve. The very little nest-egg your mother set aside for you is intact. With accrued interest it amounts to some eleven thousand seven hundred and twenty dollars. You have no debts to speak of, have you? I've paid all you ever told me about, twice, I think, and you were always frank and truthful. That little sum, with what you have to your credit in the Chemical and over there with you, represents the sum total of your fortune. You never needed it before, and so I never happened to mention it to you.

"But despite your defects in bringing up, for which I am responsible, you're not much worse off than if you'd gone into the army (I hope you've outlived that lunacy, as you did the other one for—you know), and can now make a strike for yourself. You have the best of health, the best of looks (for you strongly resemble your uncle as he was at your age), the best of education for any purpose that isn't absolutely useful, and there is nothing that I know of to prevent your marrying a fortune as I did, and living happy ever after—as I didn't.

"Don't underrate the extent of my collapse—Bloom got away with what Wall Street left—or of my love. Thank God I have no son of my own. Thank God I've only you to kneel to and say, Forgive the blind, miscalculating, but utterly humbled old fellow that——"

But here the eyes of the man seated there by the dancing waters in the glad April sunshine grew so blind with tears that he could read no more.

Out on the blue, translucent waves the white swans were paddling to and fro, dipping for bread tossed by the lavish hands of laughing children and their white-capped *bonnes*. The flashing oars of many a skiff drove through the sparkling waters, sending snowy little surges breaking from the sharp, white prows. Fairy yachts and swift paddle-wheel steamers clove the mirror surface farther from the shore, and tossed the creamy foam along their billowing wake. Half-way over to the Savoy shore, deep in the shadow of the mountains, two white-winged barques seemed wooing the faltering breeze, for not a leaf was stirring in the deep green foliage that shaded the path along the sea wall. Towering high aloft, dazzling in the sunshine, the snow-seamed, snow-capped crags blinded the eye with their radiance as they peered down into their own reflections in the sombre depths at their shadowy base. Away to the eastward, lovely little towns and villages lay at the foot of the vine-clad slopes of the northern shore, while here and there a venerable ruin—castle, convent, or fortress—stood sentinelled in bold relief on some projecting height, or nestled under the shoulder of some rocky cliff, close to the water's edge. Near at hand, in the public Place, the *carrousels*, thronged with children, old and young, were spinning madly to the reedy melodies of some donkey-driven organ. Waltz, galop, and military march rioted in loud rivalry, and a group of Italian singers, smiling indomitably, carolled "Funiculi Funicula" in nimble opposition to a Tyrolean band quacking like noisy ducks in the pavilion at the water's edge. The bell buttoned page of the Beau Rivage was still darting about, distributing letters just

brought in by the grinning *facteur*, ever a-scent for tips, and, having still three or four undelivered missives, halted in front of the American.

"Pardon, m'sieu', but—ees Mees Langdon——"

"Up at the billiard-rooms, probably," was the brusque answer, as Mr. Gray turned hastily away to hide the suspicious moisture in his eyes.

"But no. I 'ave been there. I 'ave letters for her, and for M'sieu' Sm—eet."

The gloom in the tall American's face deepened perceptibly.

"Over yonder, possibly," he answered, with a sidewise nod of the head towards a little arbor "far from the madding crowd" at the eastward edge of the pretty grounds; then turned away, impatient of further inquiry. Some men were chatting eagerly at the fountain as he passed. One of them, English unmistakably, hailed him jovially.

"Time you were ready, Gray. You're going to Chillon, of course." And, with a true Briton's deep disdain of foreign names, he spoke it as it was spelled.

"No," was the answer; "I'm going to cool off."

"Been getting a red-hot letter, as you Yankees say, I suppose," the Islander went on, impervious to satire.

"That's about the size of it," answered Gray, without halting. Two of the men looked after him with no little concern in their eyes. Others hailed him as he passed them by. Gray was evidently popular. A woman, in billowing laces and a parasol chair, smiled largely upon him as he raised his straw hat, and bade him pause, but prevailed not. Two younger women, in trim walking attire, nodded coquettishly and said it was the very day for the trip; them, too, he answered only vaguely, and, with a far-away look in his deep blue eyes, he passed on to the telegraph office, and the group of smoking men broke up.

"Something's amiss with Gray," said one of the party, a New-Yorker. "I'll go see."

"I don't see what there was in the size of the letter to upset him," said the Englishman, unconscious of slang that was not Britannia ware. "Gray's a good sort, though. Could a fellow do anything, d' you suppose?"

But the pursuer was slow. Seeing him coming, and divining his object, Mr. Gray slipped out of the side door, dived through the shrubbery that bordered a winding drive-way to the west, and took himself off through the crowded Place. He had need to be alone,—to face his changed fortunes fair and square.

Twenty-five years old, and up to the midweek mail from America he had never known a care since boyish days, unless it was some momentary heart-pang when Amy Langdon proved unkind. In a dawdling, amateurish way he had read the daily papers and signed some letters and reports laid before him by an attentive clerk in the office of the Eastern traffic manager of a great road of which his uncle was a heavy stockholder and prominent director. The most serious thing he had ever undertaken was his membership in a crack city

regiment, wherein he had served through the ranks and really earned a commission. But both these avocations he had quitted during the previous winter, and all because Amy Langdon was reported flirting dangerously at Nice and Mentone, and if she were not actually engaged to Darcy Gray he at least felt so far engaged to her that flirtation was denied him.

As pretty a girl as ever rode in Central Park was Amy, and as dashing a horsewoman, and it was Gray's admirable riding and universally acknowledged prospects that made him for the time so acceptable a *parti*. He could manage a horse far better than he could a woman, however, and Miss Langdon kept him at her side when in saddle and subject to call at all other times. But she had, not unkindly, laughed off his protestations and dissected his offers. "It's absurd, Darcy. You haven't a cent in the world that doesn't come from your uncle, and who knows what his wife will do with his fortune,—or he himself, for that matter? As for me, I'm a beggar with social aspirations. Come, be sensible, and I'll like you better. Be a soldier, Darcy, and face the facts. That's the one thing you're cut out for."

"You're hard-hearted, Amy," he had answered.

"No; only hard-headed. I'm soft-hearted enough to like you too well to spoil both our lives."

Gray believed himself much in love when she went abroad in November, and took it much to heart that she should be so constantly attended by Fred Smythe, who had no atom of sense in his head, but no end of dollars in his pocket. But when a lordling—a younger son of an older house than ever dwelt in Gotham—an Honorable, between whom and the title and estates was a lord with only one lung and that fast going—had opposed his sighs to those of Smythe, and there came rumors that Locksley Hall was to be enacted over again with an American Amy in the foreground, Darcy Gray believed it time to rush for the Riviera, and a worried old uncle most unwillingly let him go. Hunter loved that boy, his sister's son, as the apple of his eye. There wasn't anything he wouldn't have given him but the means of earning his own living. All *that* he proposed to settle magnificently. But the bottom began to drop out of the market in mid-January, and left him stranded high and dry by the middle of May. Two million dollars, said Wall Street, had "gone where the woodbine twineth."

Over beyond the hurly-burly of the public Place, crowded with townfolk and children, the road-way wound along the water's edge. Gray strode rapidly westward, his head bowed, his hands thrust deep in his trousers-pockets. He missed his usual companions, a heavy stick and a nimble fox-terrier, but both had been left with the *portier* as inappropriate to a voyage to Chillon. They were to have started, a merry party it promised to be, by the early boat from Geneva, and he could see her now cleaving the limpid waters around the headland of Morges. It was time to warn his companions that he could not go. One girl, at least, might miss him, and she should be accorded opportunity to name some other escort, Amy,—"Amy, shallow-hearted." She had disappeared with that brainless ass half an hour ago, possibly

to console him for the fact that he was not one of the dozen bidden by Madame la Comtesse to be of the party to voyage with her to the famous castle, breakfast with her aboard La France, and dine *en fête* at Montreux. Vane, the Briton, was one, and small comfort did he afford Smythe by bidding him jolly up, and perhaps Madame would let him in for post-prandial coffee at Montroo.

Gray had never been able to stomach Smythe; he called him an insupportable cad; but when, at a turn in the path, he came suddenly upon the combination of brainless ass and insupportable cad squatted on a stone, elbows on knees, his fuzzy jowls deep sunken in his hands, his eyes on the far-away line of the Savoy shore, the intruder relented. Here was woe perhaps as deep as his own.

But in this case misery loved not company, and Smythe was surly. No; there wasn't anything Gray could do for him, thanks. He was feeling seedy, that was all. It was plain to see that the interview with Miss Langdon had left him sore at heart. Gray stood another moment, irresolute. There was absolutely no reason why he should do the fellow a good turn. Smythe hated him and plainly showed it. But Gray had ignored his spleen, and ever good-humoredly tolerated him. It is easy for a man to forgive another's jealousy. But Gray had suffered too much from Miss Langdon's caprice not to know the symptoms when so patent as they were in Smythe. Ill fortune makes some natures magnanimous,—rare natures,—and Gray turned again.

"Look here, old man" ("old chap" had not then come into vogue), "if I can't do anything for you, you can for me. I was to have gone with that party, you know, to Chillon this morning. Yonder comes the boat now. Go to Madame for me, like a good fellow, and tell her I've just received ill tidings from home. I've got to go to Geneva by the ten o'clock train. I was paired off with Miss Langdon. Tell Madame I'm awfully sorry, but I can't go. She'll ask you in my place—see if she doesn't. So long."

And in another minute he was breasting the heights to Lausanne, while Smythe was speeding to Beau Rivage.

It was late that evening when he returned from a solemn day with the bankers, the consul, and certain tradesfolk whose prospects, temporal and eternal, he was given to understand were shattered by his cancellation of certain orders for furs and bijouterie. Heavy levy was made on his check-book to solace their suffering, but there is a certain recklessness of cost when one's financial tether is nearly at an end. Dinner was over at Beau Rivage. The band was playing delightfully in the south portico. Men in evening dress were sauntering and smoking and sipping coffee about the corridor. A few American and English girls with their escorts were dancing in the salon. Gray was still in "knickers," and had dined *solus* at the Hotel Terminus. He paused at the portico and gazed in at the scene of mirth, luxury, and enjoyment wherein he had been so thoroughly at home, and contrasted unflinchingly the scene with that which he had planned for his future. Now it was necessary for him to get to his room to write, and he hoped to reach it unobserved, but the Honorable Rokeby had received his instructions and nabbed him.

"Eoh, *I* say, Gray—Miss Langdon, y' know, wished to speak with you directly you came in."

"Yes," was the languid answer; "and where is she now?"

"In their salon, I fancy. She said she was too tired to dress for dinner. Had a beastly day, y' know."

Gray nodded, slowly ascended the winding stairway, and tapped at the door in the west corridor.

"'Trez," answered a boyish voice, and Darcy was exuberantly welcomed by a ten-year-old Langdon. "The mater and sis are having a row in the gallery," said he, radiantly. "Old Smythe's been pestering her. Go out there: they don't mind you, you know, and I can't get away from here until they've finished."

But further confidences were ended by the sudden entrance of Miss Langdon herself. She had evidently been watching for Gray's return. Outstretched to him in eager greeting were Amy's long, slender white hands; uplifted to his in anxious inquiry were a pair of the softest, loveliest eyes. The voice in which she spoke was soft, almost tremulous. "What is it, Darcy?"

And the hand sidled into his, and Miss Langdon to a sofa whither she would have drawn him; but, despite the hand, which, despite itself, he released, he remained on his feet and concisely answered,—

"What you expected."

"From Mr. Hunter?—Gerald, go down and play with Ralph until mother sends for you."

"Ralph isn't there," was the petulant answer.

"Then go and play; go anyhow." Then she turned for answer. "From Mr. Hunter?"

"Yes."

"And it's true?"

"Yes, every cent."

Then the hands would be no longer denied. Both went impulsively out, seized his with no timid grasp, and drew him impetuously down beside her. Then to his amaze he saw the fair face quivering piteously, the lovely eyes brimming with tears, the soft red lips twitching with uncontrollable emotion. "Oh, you poor, dear boy—oh, Darcy, Darcy, I never—I never knew how much I cared for you till now," she almost sobbed. "Gerald, if you don't leave this room instantly I'll——"

But the boy bolted, and then Darcy saw that she was gazing up at him through a briny depth of tears. Even in his surprise, even in the thrill of joy with which he heard this fond confession, he recaptured himself, as it were, in the nick of time.

"Under the circumstances, that's something I didn't expect to hear," said Darcy.

"Under other circumstances you wouldn't have heard it," said Amy.

"It's a bit rough on Smythe, isn't it?"

"It in no wise concerns him. As for Rokeby, he must take me just as I am."

"Oh," said Gray, looking fairly at her at last, and beginning to

tug at the hand she still held in her two, "it's to be an international affair, is it? And I am addressing the future Countess of Lancaster?"

"Listen to reason, Darcy," said Miss Langdon, regaining dignity and self-possession at sight of the hunger in his eyes. "I have no money. I have every ambition, every longing, every desire that only position and money can gratify. I like you better than any man I ever knew, yet I wouldn't marry you, because you hadn't enough to offer, and I never so fully felt that I could and would marry you as now—when I can't. Even Mr. Smythe, with half a million, could not buy. I am going to a higher bidder,—the highest I could find. So far as I'm concerned, that settles my fate, but it's yours I care about, Darcy. You've been a dawdler and a do-nothing all your life. What *will* you do now?"

"Be true to my friends—and their estimate of me, probably. You wouldn't have me to disappoint them, would you?"

"What on earth do you mean? Speak sensibly, Darcy. I've never been worth your trust when you gave it. Now I'm honest with you. What will you do?"

"What they all prophesied,—nothing."

"Darcy, you have brains and energy. You have—persistence enough to win anything—that's worth having," she concluded, lamely.

There was a subdued sound of sniffling on the balcony without. Over the moonlit Alpine sea the mater was gazing towards the shores of France and wondering if many mothers had such trials as daughters at whose farthingales dangled half the eligibles in society. Smythe's mother, it seems, had taken up the pen to second the plaintive baa of her golden calf, and was dealing trenchant blows at her old crony, the mother of the belle of the season.

"Mother will be in here in a moment, Darcy. You must be frank with me, and Rokeby may be up—any moment. You will stay here until—you've had time to look about you?"

"I've had plenty of time to-day. Everything's settled. Tell Rokeby I'm sorry I shan't be able to take him bear- and elk-hunting, as I promised."

"Do you mean you're going soon,—to-morrow?"

"No," said Gray, rising, "I'm going to-night."

One instant the beautiful face beside him wore an expression of utter woe, of genuine sympathy and sorrow, then decked itself with winning and conventional smiles, for the salon door, opening at the moment, revealed young hopeful, the brother, tugging at the hand of the other hopeful, monocled. Knickers and evening dress confronted each other at the threshold. Rejected Yank, accepted Briton, met as do modern mortal rivals without sign of rancor.

"Er—ah—what's up, Gray?"

"Nothing. I'm—down."

By the midnight express he left *via* Berne for Basel. He could not face the throng of inquisitive sympathizers on the morrow. He meant to skip away unnoticed, but he had been too genuinely popular, and there are men, and many of them, Briton or Boston, who will go

out of their way to say good words to a fellow in distress. Three of them trailed Gray to the station and ran him to earth on the train, and said impetuous things about being his banker, and made other offers impossible to take seriously. The only thing he *could* take was a drink with all three, until they tumbled off at the conductor's shrill summons, and through the night, under the glitter of the lamps, something came gleaming and spinning, and he caught Rokeby's handsome flask and Rokeby's parting words:

"Take a drink for me once in a while, will you, old boy? *Au revoir.*"

CHAPTER I.

THE major was sprawled on the broad of his back under the shade of a spreading cottonwood, a slouch hat, battered and weather-stained, pulled well down over his fine, dark-brown eyes, their heavy brows concealed by its jagged brim, their long, thick, curling lashes downward sweeping towards the bronzed, sun-tanned cheeks. The bristling beard and curling black moustache concealed the lines of the mouth and jaws, rendering speculation as to the major's characteristics mere guess-work, which wouldn't be the case, said Captain Trotter, a physiognomist of the first order in his own estimation, if the major's face were, as usual with him in garrison, freshly and cleanly shaved except as to the upper lip. Open at the throat, the major's dark-blue flannel shirt rolled easily back, revealing a black waste of hairy stubble down to the protuberant "Adam's apple," below which the fair skin showed almost as white as a child's and well-nigh as soft. A devotee to cold water was the major, even in his cups, and that, too, in days when the traditions of the great war still held sway in the cavalry, and the cocktail was the rule, not the exception, at morning stable-call. Not that he preached the doctrine of total abstinence or looked upon himself as a model of virtue in any way. "Whiskey never did me any good," was his modest explanation. "I never seemed to need it or to care for it. I never saw any fun in getting full, and the only time I ever did, it made me sick for a week,—a thing that never happened to me before or since. If you like it, Ray, or if it agrees with you, Blake, why, go ahead. So long as you don't get full and neglect your business, it's none of mine." Time was in the regimental past, as the major very well knew and the minors sometimes said, when Ray occasionally "got full" and when Blake seemed to think it agreed with him,—until the day afterwards, at least. But Blake and Ray had found reason to part company with their old familiar friend, that intimacy having led, as often do others, to later estrangement; that familiarity having bred contempt; that warmth, as Tom Hood would have said, having produced a coldness. "Singed cats" was what the unreconciled of the subalterns called these erstwhile jovial blades, but never where either "cat" could hear, as each was known to be unpleasantly ready to back his views. Both officers had so far mended their ways in this respect that neither would sip from the seductive

bowl, yet each was entirely willing that the rest of the commissioned list should be free agents in the matter, with the possible exceptions of Brady, who never drank that he didn't make an ass of himself, and Rawson, who never drank that he didn't make trouble for somebody else.

And about these five men,—the major, whose name is spelled M-a-i-n-w-a-r-i-n-g and always pronounced "Mannering," and Ray and Blake, who have often appeared in these chronicles of by-gone frontier days, and Brady and Rawson, who have never yet so appeared and who never will again, so far as this chronicler is concerned,—about these five men and one other yet to appear, hangs most of this story,—these six men and just two women.

Place aux dames, though this bivouac on the Boxelder was no place for them whatever, and neither woman was there at the time, and only one of them was known to any one of the men referred to. One of the women was Mrs. Mainwaring, and the other, a spinster, was Kate Leroy.

It was a hot day, a dusty day, and the command could prove it without the use of a word as it unsaddled in the grove and men and horses made for the nearest water. They had marched since early morn and covered twenty miles when the trumpets rang the signal for the final halt. They had been winding for hours in long column of twos down the sandy bottom of a vanished creek, and the sight of this oasis in the desert, the clump of cottonwoods with its outlying stragglers farther down stream, was indeed a grateful one. It told of the presence of living water, and the regiment, said Trooper Kelly, "was as dhry as the chaplain's temperance sermon the night before Patrick's Day in the morning." Mainwaring's four troops, being first on the ground, pre-empted what grass there was before breaking for the spring. Trooper law reserved to the horses of the owner all space within lariat length of the firmly driven picket-pin, and woe to the man that "jumped the claim." In like manner had the major's "striker" pre-empted the biggest cottonwood for his master's roof-tree, and there, dusted, shaken, and smoothly spread, were the major's blankets when, fresh from his dip in the stream, that sturdy, keen-eyed, compactly built soldier came back for his rest.

And there he lay, the picture of trooper content, beguiling the moments until dinner should be ready, and trying hard not to go to sleep meantime, with a copy of "Les Misérables," hauled from the depth of his capacious saddle-bags. Having had little schooling to speak of, Mainwaring was an assiduous reader of fiction, and prided himself on the fact.

Presently, without lifting his eye from the page, or glancing towards the party interrogated, who was sprawled in similar fashion under an adjacent tree, the major popped the following question:

"Blake, what's savvy ke pew?"

And Blake, without lifting his eyes from the written pages of the missive in his lean brown hand, responded, after the manner of soldier folk, "Damfino."

The major's brows contracted in a scowl. Suspiciously he glanced at his long-legged comrade. "Thought you spoke French," said he.

To which Blake blandly responded, with modest and not inexcusable hesitancy,—

"We-ll—er—not always. Isn't it—possibly, *sauve qui peut?*"

"Well, sove ke *puh*, then," responded Mainwaring, with disdainful emphasis on the convenient monosyllable. "What's that?"

"That," said Blake, "is what the girls say when Brady tries to dance,—Jump for your lives and—Brady take the hindmost. It's polite French for 'the jig is up.'"

Captain Ray, stretched at ease upon a costly Navajo blanket of which he was inordinately proud, reached out with his moccasined foot and indented the canvas re-enforcement of his comrade's field riding-breeches. "Quit it, Blake," he muttered.

But the major needed no man to protect his interests. He might not know French, but he knew Blake, and liked him,—ordinarily.

"I more than half thought you didn't know, Legs," he said, with a yawn. "Legs" was a regimental pet name for the longest and lankiest of the commissioned list. "You West Pointers have nearly all had two years' schooling in that tongue, and another year in Spanish, and I'm blessed if ever a one of you could speak either. I'd have a heap more respect for you if you'd come out like a man and say you didn't know, like Ray, for instance. There's no nonsense about him."

Here Blake kicked backward, in delighted return of his comrade's broad hint. "Well, major," he hastened to say, "my translation was a trifle free, perhaps, but the phrase is a clumsy one to turn into English. Ray will agree with me as to the translation. The main trouble with his French is the accent. It's a combination of blue grass and Apache."

"Well, he has the good sense to keep it to himself, then," answered Mainwaring, still a trifle sulky. "I'd pattern after him, if I were you."

"Faith and so I would, major mine, did not my innocent associates so often take me for a lexicon. But, now, *you* ought to speak French like a native. Mrs. Mainwaring does. You couldn't have a better teacher, and Stannard says all a man needs to learn anything in this world is brains and time. You've got lots of—time."

"What's that about Stannard?" interrupted the major, sharply, and Blake's diversion had told, as he meant that it should. If there was one man in the army of whom Mainwaring was jealous, it was Stannard. He, like Stannard, had been a capital troop commander for years. He had attained, at last, the rank of major, *vice* Barry promoted, only a year or so after Stannard; had served just as well as had Stannard; had as fine a war record, and an honored and honorable name; had a charming wife, health, and competence, yet mourned in secret—even at times made audible moan—over the fact that among the officers and men of the regiment what Stannard said, thought, did, was never to be questioned. Stannard was authority on all points of soldiering; Stannard was the expert engineer, builder, draughtsman, topographer, and all-round military "sharp;" while he, Mainwaring, whose troop had been a model, whose battalion was now really in finer shape than Stannard's, and who had abundant means and spent where

Stannard saved, was looked upon in the cavalry as a good soldier, a fine officer, despite his surly mannerisms, and yet because he hadn't enjoyed Stannard's advantages and a college, or even high school, training, he must submit to perennial playing of second fiddle. It set him against Stannard, and it led eventually to trouble.

"If you'd only be wise, Leonard," his brighter better half had said to him, "you wouldn't ask questions of Blake. Look it up in the encyclopædia, or even ask me."

"Why, hang it, Laura!" interrupted the major, "half my years are spent in saddle out in the field. You and the encyclopædia are a month's march away. I can't help wanting to know what things mean."

"Then ask Captain Truscott or Captain Freeman." She knew too much to wound him by suggesting Stannard. "Blake's propensity to burlesque everything is irresistible unless you happen to be alone with him." And Mainwaring would promise, and despite his promise would fall, for, as he frankly admitted, he couldn't help wanting to know, you know, and, as it never occurred to him that he could mispronounce any word, foreign or domestic, poor Mainwaring was eternally putting his foot in it. He and Tommy Hollis were Blake's entire delight, and neither man could resent his witticisms, even when they verged on the personal, for Blake, like Ray, was a regimental idol because of deeds that won a tribute outvying the Victoria Cross or Congressional Medal of Honor. Mainwaring swore by both as soldiers, and Hollis fairly worshipped Blake. But Tommy was away on other duty just now, and the shafts of the long-legged captain's ridicule fell most improperly on his sluggish-witted chief.

Blake did not thoroughly like him. He thought Mainwaring selfish, opinionated, and conceited. He admitted him to be a first-rate soldier, a fine drill-master and tactician, a truthful, honest, and pure-minded man, a devoted husband and father,—in fact, one of the representative men of the cavalry. It wasn't that he was narrow (his tolerance on the whiskey question was an evidence that he was not), yet he was "butt-headed," said Blake. "He's perpetually referring to Ray and to me as the exponents of the liquor habit, when both of us quit long ago. We all like Stannard, and he doesn't; at least he is always ready to disparage anything Stannard says or does, and if he were Stannard's senior instead of junior he'd overrule any decision or order of Stannard's just because it was Stannard's. So when he comes out with his bulls I can't help goading him a bit. Somebody's got to keep him in check, or we'll be getting the laugh from those fellows of the Eleventh and Twelfth."

"They wouldn't see the blunders, Blake, only you show 'em up," said Ray, in remonstrance, and with not a little reason, for Blake was incorrigible. "Some day you'll cut Mainwaring to the quick, and he comes of a stock that hits hard and doesn't forgive easy or forget at all. Better hold off, Legs."

And "hold off" Legs had to for several days of a dreary homeward march, dreary because the colonel meant to rest the horses thoroughly after a fierce and furious chase and campaign, and so made

short marches where the officers and men would gladly have made two a day. The road was dusty, the October sunshine was hot and dry, the nights were snapping cold, but here at last they were only one day out from their new station, Fort Ransom, and Blake had broken bonds again. Raising himself on elbow and peering across the blue-shirted shoulder of his friend, Ray could see that Mainwaring was still glowering at him, and evidently pondering over that reference to his having *time* enough to learn anything. As yet its full significance was not apparent, but it was the policy of wisdom to distract his attention and set his wits to work on something else. Like the horse, which noble animal Mainwaring almost worshipped, he could consider only one point at a time. So up rose Ray and strolled over to him. "If you've no objections, major, I'd like to ask the colonel to let my quartermaster sergeant ride into Ransom to-night. He tells me his wife is quite ill. The ambulance is going, and will give him a lift. We'll lead his horse with the troop to-morrow."

"Why not ride him in to-night?" asked Mainwaring, who had served but little under Atherton since the war, and knew not how strict were his rules regarding horses.

"Because the colonel wishes every horse to share and share alike. The sergeant's horse would have an extra twenty miles if ridden in to-night. Yonder comes Stannard's battalion now," he said, pointing to the dust-cloud sailing slowly towards them from the north. "He'll bivouac above us, I reckon."

"Yes, and spoil our water, like as not," growled Mainwaring. "But we've got the grass and shade."

"Devil doubt you," muttered Blake, "and you've got the best of both." Then, aloud, "Ask the old man, with my compliments, if I may do him the honor of dining with him to-morrow, Billy. Mrs. Atherton has everything ready for his coming, I'll be bound, while your better half and mine and the major's here can't come till we get there and choose quarters."

"Mrs. Mainwaring will be there quicker than I will," said the major, promptly.

"That's all easily explained. Mrs. Mainwaring knows the major's quarters can go to nobody but the major, and she can move in at once. We poor devils of troop-leaders must wait till our seniors have chosen. What's more, Mrs. Mainwaring has no nurse and babies to look after."

"No, but she's bringing a companion with her, in the shape of her niece that she's often talked to me about. I think I told you about her,—Miss Leroy. She's been abroad for a year, and wants to come and see something of her own country. They ought to reach Butte to-night, or early in the morning."

"Will she?" exclaimed Blake. "Then like as not she'll have an escort: Rawson's coming out with a batch of recruits."

"Bah!" growled Mainwaring, who had little use for Rawson or any other officer who was away on leave when his regiment was in the field. "Mrs. Mainwaring's never met him, and, if she had, would feel mighty small security in his escort,—a fellow that'll be held up with a whole car-load of passengers by only two robbers."

Mainwaring alluded to a matter that was a sore spot in the —th and that never yet had been fully explained. But Mr. Rawson, three months earlier that summer, had unquestionably been relieved of his few valuables at the point of the pistol on the K. P. Road. The regiment meant to worry the life out of him when he rejoined, but didn't like it that Mainwaring, a new-comer, should be the first to crack the whip. Blake almost wanted to blaze up, but thought it best perhaps to wait for Ray, and so subsided.

Ray, however, had sauntered out to the edge of the scanty patch of timber, and, shading his eyes with his brown hand, was scanning with professional interest the long column of dusty troopers, two abreast, that came filing into view around a little point five hundred yards away. Well out in their front, short, square, and stocky, rode their major, his adjutant, trumpeter, and orderly jogging along behind. To him rode the colonel's messenger, the regimental adjutant, and pointed out a line some distance up-stream. Thither the head of column veered, moving at steady walk. The guidon-bearer, at a signal from the battalion adjutant, spurred out to the front, and, with the old silken swallow-tail streaming in the wind, loped across the level to a point ten yards or so from the bank, was halted there by the young officer in person, and then, lance at rest, he and his horse stood motionless. Never quickening the pace, the captain at the head of Stannard's foremost troop directed his march on this living guide-post. The guidon of the second troop, followed speedily by those of the third and fourth in like manner, darted out across the prairie, each in succession being halted and established at half-distance in rear of his predecessor on the line of guides. Each troop directed itself upon its own color; each in succession formed line to the left as its leading two came opposite the guidon; each was aligned to the right; then, without loss of time, the trumpets sounded, "Prepare to dismount;" the brown carbines were jerked from their sockets and tossed over the right shoulder as the odd-numbered troopers rode clear of the rank. "Dismount," clamored the trumpet, and down out of sight sank some fifty-odd blue flannel shirts and rusty old hats in each line. "Form rank." And out from among the chargers popped the vanished riders, each laying hold of the reins close to the bit as the line reformed and the captain said his brief speech: "Water as soon as you like, men, and graze well out to the north until nightfall. No side lines necessary to-day. Dismiss the troop, sergeant." And the next thing a dozen men were scampering like mad, lariats and picket-pins swinging, heading for the most promising patches of grass. Each picket-pin was stamped home, the lariats uncurled to their full length, and then back ran the troopers to unsaddle and lead to water. Ten minutes more, and the chargers of Stannard's battalion, perhaps two hundred and fifty in all, were being slowly driven in four distinct herds well out upon the northward slopes, where, after a preliminary roll, each horse set contentedly to grazing. Those pre-empted patches close at hand were reserved for their further use at night.

And then the little cook-fires began to blaze along the bank, and the pack-trains shambled in, and were unloaded in the twinkling of an

eye. The mules went blinking off to water, and the major, never quitting his saddle until his last trooper dismounted, slowly lowered himself to earth and went off in search of the colonel.

"If you've no objections, sir, I'd like to send a sergeant in ahead to-night."

"Why, Stannard," said the colonel, looking up from under his hat-brim in some surprise, "that's just what Ray's been asking. Anything amiss?"

"Well, his time expires to-morrow, sir. It's old Bannon, of 'B' Troop, and he'd like to catch the East-bound train, so's to have all the time possible to go and visit his children in Illinois. He'll re-enlist at once."

"And your man, Ray?"

"Is Sergeant Merriweather, sir. He says his wife's at Ransom quite sick, and he's anxious and troubled about her."

"Isn't he the man that we had to reprimand for letting certain horses stray up on the Belle Fourche?"

"The very man, sir. He is careless at times, and not altogether reliable, but he's one of the smartest, nattiest men I've got, and——"

"Didn't he marry that pretty maid-servant of the Freemans' after we got back from the Ute campaign?"

"Yes, sir, and Freeman hasn't forgiven me yet," answered Captain Ray, his white teeth gleaming. "I'm very sure I should be glad to have him take her back. She's turned the heads of some of my best men, and is running Merriweather heels over head in debt."

The colonel pondered a moment. "I greatly dislike to refuse you anything," he said; "but every time we come in from scout or campaign, since I joined the regiment, no sooner are we within a day's march or so of the home station—or any station, for that matter—than several men ask to ride in ahead. At first even the officers did, and there were as many as a dozen men. Now we've reduced it to two. When did Merriweather hear from his wife?"

"The mail rider, sir, going up to the Sioux Agency, met us this morning early and gave him a letter. He brought it to me to read. It was written by the post-trader's wife. She says Mrs. Merriweather is really seriously ill."

"Very good. Then he can go by the ambulance. So can your man, major. Tell them both to report here at three o'clock. Isn't Merriweather's time nearly out, Ray?"

"Only two months to serve, sir, and he says he's going into business with a brother in Chicago. I lose three non-commissioned officers this fall in that way, and one of them I couldn't take on again: he's all broken down with wounds and rheumatism. You'll have to favor me a bit in the matter of recruits, colonel. I need six, or shall before we're a month older."

"You shall have the first good man that enlists at Ransom, Ray. I'm told we may pick up some first-rate material there, the mines have broken so many."

"All right, colonel; and I'll remind you if I see any likely civilian hanging around head-quarters. Good-day, sir, and thank you very

much." So saying, Captain Ray wheeled about and trudged away down-stream to make report to his battalion commander.

"Did he say Merriweather could go?" asked the major, glancing up at Ray's sunshiny face. "I wouldn't, if I were in his place."

"He wasn't over-willing at first," was the answer. "However, my fellows will all be wishing themselves back in the field before they've been home a fortnight,—small blame to them."

"What's the reason you're so down on garrison life, Ray?"

"I'm not down on it exactly, major, but if it weren't for the wife and boys I'd be glad if we were forever in the field," answered Ray. "Men get killed in this Indian business, but they—keep out of trouble. There's Merriweather, now. He was a tip-top sergeant in the Sioux campaign. He was one of the best all-round troopers and non-commissioned officers in the regiment all through the campaigns that followed in the next three years, and he's been running down steadily ever since he fell in love with that flibbertigibbet of Freeman's. Garrison life and girls spoil many a good cavalryman," he concluded, oracularly.

"Don't dare me to tell that to Mrs. Ray as your sentiments," grinned the major.

"Oh, everything depends on the girl, of course," said Ray, growing instantly grave. "Blakey and I—well, *I*, at least, owe everything to my wife," he finished, almost reverently. Then presently he spoke again. "But what chance has the average trooper? What manner of woman has he to mate with, if he mate at all? Next batch of recruits I get should be anchorites, so far as women are concerned."

"Sailors are just as bad as soldiers," said Mainwaring, sagely. Whereat Blake ducked his head under his blanket in convulsions of delight.

"I know, sir," said Ray, glancing vengefully at the contortions of the worn gray slumber-robe, and biting his own lip hard to repress the bubbling fun. "What I mean is that I'd like to get the troop full of fellows that couldn't be twisted around a woman's finger."

"You never will, Ray," said Mainwaring, thereby proving that he knew human nature, if not books. "You can take your pick of this gang that Rawson's bringing out with him, or of any of the men that offer themselves at Ransom, and I'm willing to bet that the next man you enlist will be woman-driven from the word go."

CHAPTER II.

THE night express was fifty minutes late already, and engine 783, waiting at the Junction with her snow-plough set, was hissing and rumbling impatiently. The big brown building, embracing hotel and waiting-rooms, ticket- and station-master's office, loomed up against the star-dotted sky. The switch-lights gleamed in crimson, green, and dazzling white here, there, and everywhere along the glinting rails. Bleary lamps were burning in frost-covered windows, and tiny sparks

fluttered from the pipe of the solitary biped on the platform, a burly man in the toil-stained garb of a locomotive engineer, a sturdy fellow who limped as he stamped up and down the creaking planks of the platform, his hands in his pockets, his eyes everywhere. To him came forth his fireman, splitting his mouth with a wedge of bilious-looking pound-cake. He strove to speak, but, finding articulation impossible, jerked backward his head and pantomimed the process of serving himself with a cup of comforting drink,—coffee, presumably, for he was fresh from the lunch-counter.

"Come, swallow the rest of that grub, now, and be lively with your oil-can. We can't wait two minutes after she once gets in. No," he continued, as the younger repeated his persuasive pantomime, "I had my tea at home, and that's enough. You'll die of over-eating, first thing you know. Do your best now. We've got an extra Pullman and a car-load of greenhorns to haul up to Butte this night of all others, and I'm betting it's snowing in the mountains now."

So saying, the engineer turned and gazed anxiously westward, where even the stars seemed blotted from sight, then quickly whirled about and bent his ear.

"Coming at last," he muttered. "That's old Coyote's yelp for the cross-roads. Damned little wind for whistling has she left, either. No wonder No. 3's late, with nothing better than that limping carcass to drag it. She ought to be in the bone-yard,—ought to 'a' been there a year ago. But here's the beauty," said he to himself, as he turned and laid a loving hand on the massive driving-rod of the huge machine. "Lively, Scut," he added: "3's coming."

Scut was descending from the cab as a cat comes down a tree, backward. "What 'n 'ell they takin' recruits to Ransom for now?" he asked. "The war's over."

"It's to fill the gaps made when the war wasn't over, young man, and mighty hard they'll find it to fill some of 'em, too. Jim Strang, that was killed at Cave Springs, was corporal with me in Bates's troop eight years ago, and there wasn't a better sergeant in all the cavalry. Lo loves a shining mark, or I'd never got hit twice in one day."

"Would you go back to soldierin' if you could, Mr. Long?" asked the fireman, tilting up his long-necked can as he thrust the nozzle deep in between the spokes of a massive driver.

"I? Give me back the legs I had before the Sioux made a sieve of my skin, and it isn't the rail I'd be riding, but the best sorrel in Billy Ray's troop, and with the best office in it, and that's first sergeant."

"It's takin' chances to be in the cavalry these days," said he of the oil-can, listening to the low, far-away rumble of the coming train. "Do you see her head-light yet?"

"She isn't through the cut," was Long's answer. "As to taking chances, they've done nothing but take chances in that regiment ever since the war; yet there isn't a day of our lives we don't take chances, and bigger chances, right here on this mountain division."

A tall young fellow in travelling-cap and ulster had come out from the lunch-room and was strolling over towards the hissing engine.

He stopped and listened as Long spoke, then seemed to be pondering over the words and looking to the engine-man for explanation.

"How do you mean?" asked Scut, pausing in his work and looking up. "We haven't had a 'hold-up' on the road for over a year."

"Neither have we had a head-on collision, nor spreading rails, nor a plunge from a trestle, but they are only three of the things likely to occur any minute, especially when trains are running behind as we are to-night,—all on account of that one-eyed Coyote that's peeping at you down yonder."

It was the head-light of No. 3, just dawning on the view at Mile End Crossing, to which the engineer referred.

"Watch how slowly she comes," he added. "The old maid is about worn out. Here's the girl that can shake that train up grade as though 'twas made of bandboxes. I'll bet you we make Butte by seven o'clock."

"I'll bet you don't, if you'll let me in," was the cool interjection of the young man ulster-clad; "for Butte's my objective point."

"What do you know about it, or about railroading?" asked Long, suspiciously.

"As much as you did when you quit soldiering, and no more, wherein we have much in common, Mr. Long; but here's where the difference comes in. You quit soldiering to take to the railroad; I quit the road to take to soldiering."

"Oh, I see. Then you're an officer?" queried Long, his accustomed lips framing the little word "sir" and almost resenting his enforced omission of the once familiar monosyllable. Long said "sir" to no one under the division superintendent now.

"I? Devil a bit," was the laughing answer. "I'm not even a lance,—not even a recruit. Man, I haven't signed my papers yet."

"Then take a fool's advice and don't sign them," interposed Long. "*You*'ve got no call to go soldiering. Such as you come in only when it's whiskey or women or cards."

"Say it's all three, if you like," was the half-laughing answer. "I heard of you as one of the old cavalrymen at the barracks yonder," and the stranger nodded carelessly over his shoulder in the direction of the post, established long years before when the road was being built. "They sent me there by mistake. It's the cavalry I want, not infantry."

The engineer looked the speaker over in surprise. Away down the track the head-light of the incoming train was growing bigger every moment, and the rumble of the bulky approach could be plainly heard.

"You don't look like a man who had to take to soldiering," he said.

"Oh, I'm not," was the prompt, good-natured reply. "I do it simply because I've a hankering that way, and—no other," he added, under his breath. "Perhaps you can tell me something of the regiment at Ransom?"

"Enough about it to talk from here to 'Frisco, but there's no time now. We've got to pull out with that train the moment their engine

gets out of our way. But you're the first man I ever met out here who would openly say he was going to enlist. They all come up shamefaced like, as though it was the last thing they wanted people to know."

"Oh, I never found it paid to sail under false colors," was the answer, in a tone of gay good humor, not unmixed with a dash of reckless disdain. "I've nothing to lose. But I would like to ask you something about the troop commanders there at Ransom. Can't you give me a lift in the cab? I've a pocketful of better weeds than you get out this way, if that's any inducement." And, so saying, he reached down into the deep pocket of his ulster and brought out a handful of cigars.

Mr. Long's manner changed in an instant. "'Gainst orders," said he, briefly, gazing suspiciously into the stranger's face as he spoke. "Better get your ticket, if you're going to Butte." And, swinging himself up to his perch, he grasped the reversing lever with one hand and the throttle with the other. Scut laid hold of the cord and set the big bell to swinging warning of their coming. The huge machine began slowly to move rearward as the much maligned and belated Coyote came hissing by on the fireman's side, and that begrimed young man availed himself of the chance to chaff his fellow-workers in the flitting cab. He took no heed, therefore, of the stranger's parting hail, but Long was eying him closely and listening for any word.

"I've got tickets all right," said the lonely man on the platform, "but I'd rather sit up in a cab than sleep in a Pullman. It's all right, though. Have a smoke anyhow." And with lavish hand he tossed half a dozen cigars into the cab as he walked beside the moving engine. Then, with a cordial wave of his hand, he turned aside to the lunch-room, into the door-way of which a half-score of hungry passengers from the arriving train were eagerly pushing.

"Only three minutes, gents," sung out the conductor. "We've got to make up time before we reach the Rockies—can't do it there." And he darted into the train-despatcher's office to register and receive his orders.

Meantime Scut, still clinging to the bell-cord with one hand, was scooping up cigars with the right. "That fellow's a prince," said he. "Just look at that for a seegar." And he held it admiringly up to Long to see, and was amazed at the gloom in his companion's face. "Why, what's up?" he asked.

"What's up?" repeated the engineer, as he slowed down on nearing the forward end of the mail-car. "A hold-up, unless I'm mistaken, and the fewer of them cigars you stick in your mouth the more brains you'll have left in the morning." With a sharp click the heavy coupling-pin was driven home, and Long sent the reversing lever over to the front, then poked his head out of the side of the cab and shouted to a train-hand he saw hurrying by, "Where you got them recruits, Billy?"

"First coach behind the baggage," was the answer, as the man glanced over his shoulder. "There's some of 'em now." And, as he spoke, bounding, laughing, and dodging through the knot of hungry

passengers, half a dozen young fellows in fatigue uniform or bright blue overcoats went hastening by to the lunch-room, followed by shouts from somewhere back along the train. Presently a middle-aged man in the garb of a sergeant of cavalry came stalking after them, a man who seemed just aroused from sound sleep, and not too well pleased as a consequence.

"Get back to that car, you men," he ordered, authoritatively. "Didn't I tell you not a soul of you could leave it without my permission?"

But the recruits were lined up at the lunch-counter by this time, and gleefully shouting for coffee and reaching for doughnuts, pie, anything edible within reach. The waiter looked perturbed and hesitated. The proprietor came hurrying over from his desk. The little throng of passengers seemed sympathetic and interested. "Who's to pay for this?" demanded the owner, as the sergeant came fuming and almost fighting his way into the crowded room. "Have your men got any money?"

"'Course we have," sung out a jovial Pat, "and the credit of a benevolent and paternal government to back it, and there's my last cint to prove what I say," he added, whacking down a silver dollar on the counter.

"That ain't enough by the mate to it," said the proprietor, gruffly. "Come, clear out, you boys. Train's going; no time for coffee. This will pay for the things you're eating," said he; and he made a grab for the dollar, but Pat was too quick for him.

"'Board," shouted a hoarse voice on the platform without.

"Back to your car, you men," ordered the sergeant.

"Give me that dollar," demanded the boss.

"Give us the coffee," replied the recruits, and for once the populace seemed to side with the soldier. The tall young man in the ulster and travelling-cap lounged up to the counter and tossed a two-dollar bill at the angry manager. "Give them what they want," said he, "and be quick about it. Have some coffee yourself, sergeant. There'll be no other chance till you get to Butte." Then, with swift, significant, downward glance at the flap of a pocket, he lifted into view the silver top of a sizable flask, and the sergeant grinned and nodded appreciatively. The steaming cups were slid along the board, the embryo soldiers laughing and hustling good-naturedly, pouring the hot liquid into the thick stone saucers and blowing industriously at the yellow-brown flood. The conductor came to the door and stormed; the passengers began to edge away for their cars. No. 783 gave a warning whoop or two, and the fireman pulled at the bell-cord, but the blue-coats wouldn't budge.

"Go ahead, Long. Damned if I'll hold this train another second," shouted the conductor, with energetic wave of his lantern. Hiss went the stop-cocks. The big engine quivered and trembled in response, and with convulsive cough a volume of inky smoke was belched from the stack. Scut's bell clanged furiously, but only very slowly the long, ponderous train began to move. The crockery rattled and the windows shook as the massive engine came boiling and rumbling and

panting by. The conductor heard his name called by the engineer and hurried alongside. "Look out for that kid in the big ulster. Tell you why at Willow Springs," was the hoarse warning, as, with slowly quickening speed, old 783 went ponderously on. The conductor looked dazed. The joyous band of blue-coats came tumbling forth as the foremost car rolled smoothly past, and, agile as monkeys, leaped to the platform of the baggage and "smoker," waving their caps and shouting jovial farewells. The sergeant, once more assuming official relations, sternly ordered them within their own car, and bade them keep quiet, that the other men, wearied, might sleep. Then the conductor came hurriedly in and glanced eagerly about him as the sergeant looked at his watch.

It was just half-past one.

"Who's your friend in the ulster?" demanded the conductor. "Where'd he go?"

"Never saw him before in my life," said the sergeant. "I s'posed we left him there," he added, with regretful thought of that handsome, capacious, silver-topped flask.

"Did you see where he went?" asked the conductor of the brakeman who followed in.

"Thought he jumped on the next car," was the answer. "He had a grip-sack, I know."

"Go and see," was the brief order.

The official turned once more to the sergeant, who was settling himself back in his seat. "Say, you'll have to take better care of your men," he began. "I can't have them bouncing out at every stopping-place and delaying the train."

"You don't," said the sergeant, with a yawn. "That's the first time any one of them has got off, and they wouldn't have done that if it wasn't that they were hard up for coffee."

"You should have given them coffee last night at the supper station," said the conductor, wrathfully.

"I did, and it was so bad they threw it away. This was better, and I'm sorry they weren't all awake to have some. They'll need it before we get to Butte. What time can we make it now, d'you s'pose?"

"Not before seven, if we do then. We have two freights and a cattle-train to meet, and everything's running crooked to-night, even if we have no other trouble. Sure you never saw that fellow in the ulster before?"

"Sure. What's the matter with him? He treated like a nabob."

"That's one reason I want to know all about him. What arms have you fellows?"

"None at all," was the answer, as the sergeant looked up in surprise. "I've a revolver, of course, but that's all. Why? You never have a 'hold-up' along here, do you?"

But the conductor did not answer. The train had "struck its gait," as he expressed it, now, and was swaying as it tore westward along the rattling rails. The brakeman was hastening back to the car. "See him?" queried the conductor, impatiently.

"No, sir: he's gone back to the sleeper."

Somewere among the drowsing car-load of recruits a voice was uplifted in not unmelodious song. Most of the men were sleeping soundly, but the lively squad of night-owls just bundled aboard, refreshed by their coffee and bite at the station, seemed desirous of further entertainment. "Odd," said the conductor, "I've hauled many a lot of poor devils out to Wyoming and beyond; most of 'em never came back, but I never yet saw a lot that didn't sing. What on earth have they got to sing for?"

"The Lord knows," answered the sergeant, "and I've been soldiering twenty years."

"Always in the cavalry?"

"Yes, all but one 'listment in a casemate that brought me nearer to desertion than ever I thought to be."

"Never meet my engineer,—Jimmy Long? He used to be sergeant in the cavalry out here. Got shot through the legs in an Indian fight seven or eight years ago and had to quit."

"Know *of* him well, as most of us did, and I'd be glad to see him. He's pulling us to-night, is he?"

"Yes, and I wish you'd come forward with me when we get to Willow Springs, only a few miles ahead now. He thinks there's something wrong with that young fellow in the ulster. I've got to go back and look him up. Meet me on the platform, right-hand side, when we stop, will you?"

The sergeant nodded, and the conductor went his way.

In the foremost sleeper he found the object of his search, already comfortably ensconced in the smoking-compartment, his ulster thrown aside, his feet on the opposite seat, a fragrant cloud of smoke curling from the tip of his cigar. He had raised the window, and was gazing out upon a spangled firmament above, a black void where lay the barren earth below. Without a word, his cigar still between his teeth, he felt in the waistcoat-pocket of a well-made travelling-suit of tweed, took out a card-case, and extracted therefrom his railway and berth tickets and handed them to the lantern-bearing official.

The conductor studied the former closely. It was a "through" from Chicago to Butte, unlimited. He turned it upside down, hind side foremost, and still seemed to find nothing amiss.

"Where'd you get this?" he presently asked, glancing keenly at the young man from under his cap visor. The passenger, still without removing his cigar, simply pointed to the head of the ticket, which showed that it was purchased at the office of the C. R. I. & P. in Chicago. "Stopped off at Platte Junction?" asked the conductor.

"Yes. What time will we reach Butte?"

"Not before seven. Plenty of time to go to bed and sleep." And the tone of the railway official plainly indicated that that was what the conductor thought the young man ought to do, instead of mooning to all hours of the night in the smoking-room. The passenger gravely nodded acquiescence and said nothing. After an irresolute pause the conductor again spoke: "Did you tell the porter to show you to your berth?"

The traveller in tweeds was evidently a youth of varying moods. Chatting with the engineer he was frank, jovial, light-hearted, even confiding. In the brief scene with the troopers he was laughing and friendly, even lavish, from their point of view. Was it some sense of suspicion, some subtle intuition that he was the object of a special scrutiny on the conductor's part,—that he was being subjected to a cross-questioning never thought of in the case of other patrons of the road? Something in the conductor's look, tone, and manner had given him umbrage. Like some itinerant clam, storm-tossed and at odds with the world, he drew within his shell and clamped the jaws of his reserve. Something akin to a frown settled between his eyebrows. He looked coolly, almost defiantly, straight into the half-closed eyes of his questioner, with a pair of wide-open keen blue orbs of his own, and under his soft brown moustache his curved pink lips set like a trap. For a moment he made no reply, then finally answered, "No."

Mr. Jarvis was an old hand. He had run trains over the Transcontinental ever since it first bored a way through the hunting-grounds of the Sioux, and many a tramp had he hustled off the cars in mid-prairie, but this was no tramp. This was a self-possessed, well-dressed, fine-looking tourist, and, but for the straight, sharp, American clip to his words, rather of the English type. He nettled the conductor, and the conductor had nettled him. Each was now bristling at every point, and in no mood to appreciate the other's position.

"Well, do you propose to sit up all night?" was the next question, propounded in a tone common enough on the far-away Western railway a decade or so ago.

"What earthly business is it of yours whether I do or not? I've bought a berth and the privilege of using it or not as I see fit."

The train was slowing. It was nearing Willow Springs. The conductor had other duties to attend to, and knew he must quit the field.

"I'll see you later, my cocky friend," he muttered to himself, as he turned angrily away, with distinct sense of defeat, then let himself out on the platform with a most unprofessional slam of the sleeper door.

It was a long hundred yards up to the engine, but Jarvis hastened through the day-car and smoker until he came to the recruit-car platform, by which time the train was at a stand and he could safely spring off and run alongside. Under the dim light of the station, the tall figure of the cavalry sergeant loomed before his eyes, his chevrons, stripes, and buttons gleaming. The station-keeper came sleepily forth as the conductor stepped into the dim beam of light from the office window. "Come on up to the engine with me," he said, and, wondering, the drowsy servitor followed. The platform was short, and the trio presently had to spring down and trudge along the prairie sod by the track side. Long was waiting for them, leaning out from his cab. At sight of the once familiar crossed sabres and buttons a gleam of pleasure shot across his grimy face.

"Hullo," he said. "I used to know pretty much every fellow that wore the stripes in that regiment."

"And pretty much every fellow in it knew you or of you. My name's Kearney," said the sergeant, reaching up a hand. But the conductor had no time for ceremonies.

"What's this about the feller in the ulster?" he demanded. "He's ticketed through to Butte from Chicago, and is sassy as they make 'em. What d' you know?"

"I don't *know* anything. But you remember that affair on the K. P. last July,—the swell that shot the expressman near Wallace? Well, he was just such another good-looking fellow as this, well dressed and all that, with lots of money. What makes me suspicion this chap is that he says he's out here to enlist; wanted to ride in the cab and talk about it to me. Who ever heard of a fellow wanting to enlist until he was dead broke or half starved? This young fellow's pockets are full of cigars."

"*He* don't want to enlist," chimed in Sergeant Kearney, derisively. "He has a roll as thick as my hand. Treated all the crowd back there at the Junction."

"You hear that?" said Long. "It's just like as not he's aboard to find out who's in that sleeper and who's armed in the day-car, and we'll meet his pals somewhere up in the foot-hills. Better let some of the soldiers into the express-car and one or two here with me after we pass No. 12. Where does she side-track for us?"

"We'll get orders at Boulder Creek," answered the conductor. "I'll watch our cocky friend till then. No. 12 can't pull out of Thunder Gap till we get there. Now let her go for all she's worth, Jimmy."

Then back to the platform he hurried, eagerly explaining to the silent station-master the cause of their delay earlier in the night. The sergeant sprang aboard, and Jarvis swung his lantern.

"You haven't heard of 12 at all?" he shouted.

"Not since she left Pawnee," was the answering cry. "They'll hold her at the Gap."

And now as the sergeant re-entered the stuffy coach the songster had ceased. The melodious sounds had given place to many a snore. He glanced again at his watch, and the hands were pointing to five minutes of two.

CHAPTER III.

RUSHING westward through the night, the great train was indeed "going for all she was worth." Twenty-five miles away lay the foot-hills. There began the tortuous up-hill climb to the high plateau at Pawnee, forty miles of twist, turn, tug, and pull, that in the earlier days of the road were never attempted without two engines. Now the mammoths like 783 scorned even a pusher. But to-night she had to haul an extra sleeper and an extra coach, both crowded, the latter packed with recruits, the former with a joyous party of excursionists, bound for the Pacific coast. It was swift, straight, smooth running along the flats of the broad valley, dotted here and there as it was with

farms and ranches, and traversed over the old buffalo ranges by great herds of horned cattle. This crisp, moonless, star-lit night all the Western world was dark and still, but for the clank and rush of the flashing monster with its long, dimly-lighted train. The lonely occupant of the smoking-compartment, gazing silently out upon the northward heavens, had forgotten to keep alive the tiny fire of his cigar, and it had died unnoticed between his long, white, slender fingers. A glance at the handsome watch he drew from his waistcoat-pocket told him it was almost two o'clock as, after a brief stop at some unknown, almost unseen, station, the train rolled on again. The porter had come in to ask some question about how he would have his pillow, front or back, and was told it made no difference. Would the gentleman like one here in the smoking-room? No, he would turn in presently. Call him in plenty of time for Butte. Then the porter tiptoed off to the rear of the heavily curtained aisle and curled himself up in a vacant section, leaving the stranger to his thoughts.

And that these were sad there could be no doubt whatever. His face as it sank into repose looked white and drawn in the dim light of the overhanging lamp. Once or twice, as he gazed out upon the waste of darkness, his eyes seemed to fill, his lip to quiver with strange, strong emotion. Once he bent forward, covered his face with both hands, and leaned his elbows on his knees, then suddenly started, pulled himself together, "braced up" as he perhaps would have expressed it, thrust the moist end of the cigar between his teeth, found it cold and unresponsive, tossed it away, arose, gave himself a shake, took the flask from his ulster-pocket and passed through the door-way to the lavatory where were the ice-water tanks, and started despite himself.

A haggard face, flattened against the glass of the forward door-way, was peering in at him,—a face that was instantly withdrawn.

This was before the days of vestibuled cars. Seizing the door-knob and laying his flask on one of the basins, the young fellow quickly let himself out upon the platform and glanced about him. There on the lowest step, clinging to the hand-rail, cringed and cowered the figure of a man who turned his head and gazed piteously, pleadingly up at the tall stranger. A tramp beyond doubt, and a shivering wretch he was, for the night air was sharply cold. A powerful hand was laid upon the shoulder of the crouching figure and heaved it up, and the poor creature's teeth chattered as he made some inaudible plea.

"I can't hear you," said the man in tweeds. "Come in here. You're half frozen." And he would have led him into the sleeper, but found that the snap-latch was set,—that he had locked himself out. Still clinging to his prisoner, he led on into the rear door of the day-coach ahead. The lights were burning blear and dim. The passengers, curled or sprawled about their seats, were sleeping as best they could. A brakeman's lantern lay on the floor at the head of the aisle, and the brakeman sat in a forward seat, half dozing, wholly unconscious of the addition to the car-load.

"Stealing a ride, I suppose?" said our traveller, presently. "Where're you trying to get to?" And with a shrug of his shoulders he glanced pityingly at his quaking captive.

"To Pawnee,—half-way over the range," was the shivering answer. "I've got a sick wife there, and was beatin' my way as well as I could——" But the poor fellow gave it up. Cold and misery and hunger were too much for him. The train was slowing up again; another prairie station,—they had them every ten or dozen miles. The brakeman shook himself, picked up his lantern, and went out in front. The party in tweeds shoved his new acquaintance into the first vacant seat, swung himself to the ground the moment the train stopped, ran back, and tapped under a rear window of the sleeper, and the sash was raised and the porter's head popped out.

"Let me in at the rear door, porter," said Tweeds. "I locked myself out."

The negro recognized the voice of his well-dressed passenger, sniffed a double fee, and jumped for the door.

"Beg pardon, suh; sorry, suh, but we has to lock these doors at night out hyuh: tramps come in 'most any time if we don't."

But the young man smiled carelessly, hastened through the car, got his flask, set the latch so that he could re-enter, and the next minute was administering a stiff drink to the rag-heap on the rear seat. Once more the man essayed to tell his story. He was penniless, he hadn't even anything left to sell, but out from an inner pocket he took an old worn card photograph and showed it to his new-found friend. "My wife and baby," said he, with a choke, "but the baby's gone,—thank God."

"Here, take another drink," said Tweeds. Then back to the smoker he went, and reappeared with some sandwiches. The train again moved on. The brakeman returned, became aware of the new-comers, and came down and curiously inspected them. The liquor, the warmth, the food, and human sympathy were restoring courage to the abject object of a few minutes before. He looked up without a quaver at the brakeman's hail, but Tweeds spoke for him. "I found this poor fellow back here a few miles half frozen, and hauled him in. He only wants to go on to Pawnee. It's all right: he can pay his fare when the conductor comes."

The brakeman went off suspiciously to hunt up his chief and report, and the conductor promptly appeared. His face grew darker at sight of the two. He held irresolutely the ten-dollar bill handed him by Tweeds, and looked from one man to the other in deep distrust. "I don't understand this," he said. "How'd you—where'd you get aboard?"

"At Willow Springs," said the tramp. "I walked there from the Junction. I'd 'a' frozen if it hadn't been for this gentleman."

"I can't change this," said the conductor. "I'll fetch it presently." And, nodding to his brakeman to follow him, he hurried up the aisle. At the forward end of the car he whispered, "Watch those two like a cat, now. I'm going forward to get the sergeant and some of his men and seat them here where they can keep an eye on that precious pair. There's fun ahead for somebody this night, but, by God, they don't catch old Bill Jarvis napping. You stay here, now, till I come."

But no sooner were they gone than the tramp began brokenly to

heap thanks and blessings on his benefactor, and the latter impatiently turned away. "That's all right," said he. "Never mind that. I'm glad to help, for I believe your story. The conductor will give you the change when he comes in. Now, good-night: I've got to turn in."

"But—say; Mister; Stranger,—hold on one minute. I—I want to pay this back—some day. How'll I know you? Where'll I send it?"

But Tweeds shook his head, waved him off, strode back to the sleeper, sprung the latch against pursuit, then half filled a glass from his flask, gulped the contents down, and reseated himself in the smoking-compartment. "That's the first man I've found in a fortnight," said he, "more miserable than I am."

With that he took some letters from his pocket, glanced them over, and tore the envelopes to shreds, sending the fragments sailing on the night. At a small card photograph in a flat Russia leather case, a portrait of a laughing girlish face, he gazed lingeringly, then returned it to an inner pocket. "No one would know it now," he muttered. Next he lifted from his card-case a dozen or more pasteboards that bore in plain, heavy script the words "Mr. Darcy Hunter Gray," ripped them into shreds, and sent them flying. As calmly and methodically he searched through every pocket for every scrap of paper, bills or billet-doux, anything that could tend to establish his identity; glanced dubiously at the monogram on the back of his watch; scraped the lettering out of the crown of his hat; took a fountain-pen from his pocket and some paper and envelopes from his satchel; wrote with infinite difficulty, owing to the swaying of the car, two brief notes which he enclosed and stowed under the flap of his bag, then once more glanced at his watch. It was two forty-five, and No. 783 was whistling for Boulder Creek. At last they were out of the valley. Now for the climb up the divide.

"One cigar," he muttered. "I let the other go out." His match-box had disappeared. He tried one pocket after another, without result. Neither was there one to be had in the compartment. The train had stopped, and he could hear footsteps on a wooden platform and the muffled voices of men. Tiptoeing through the long, dim, curtain-bordered aisle, he was suddenly checked. Out from a narrow opening between the curtains of the second section came a slender little white hand, holding a silver travelling-cup, and a soft voice, silvery as the cup, murmured, "Oh, porter, would you kindly get me some water?" Mr. Gray took the cup, filled it, restored it with a bow to the unseen occupant, watched the lily-white hand, with its few treasures of rings, slip back between the folds, then aroused the porter, proffered his request for matches, and asked if there was any possibility of the ladies being incommoded by his smoking.

"No, suh, not a bit, suh. They can't smell it when you stay in the smoking-room. There's only two ladies in the car, suh. Both going up to Butte,—Mrs. Mainwaring and a young lady with her."

"Know her name?"

"No, suh, I don't, suh. The lady with her calls her Pet mos' the time."

Mr. Gray once more returned to his compartment, lighted his cigar, and seated himself in the corner by the open window. The train still lay at the station. Voices still echoed among the dingy wooden buildings, and a light or two flickered about the platform. The conductor's voice was presently heard. He was interrogating the station-agent, and Gray, seated close to the open casement, couldn't help hearing.

"Both took tickets to Pawnee?"

"Yes, both. Left their horses here in Hank's stable and took supper. No, they haven't been drinking at all."

Mr. Jarvis lowered his voice. He was talking eagerly, but only the answer was audible.

"Oh, of course; cowboys always are. Each has his revolver and knife. But you'll see 'em for yourself: they're in the smoking-car."

"Sure nobody knew 'em around here?"

"Certain. They said they'd never been here before."

Mr. Jarvis waved his lantern. "Well, we've got to go," said he, "but you keep your eyes and ears open, and wire after us. I suppose it's all right about No. 12," he shouted, as he swung on the platform.

The station-agent's voice followed them out into the night.

"She's coming along all right. Suppose you'll meet her at the Gap. She's due there at three ten."

"Due there in five minutes," thought Mr. Gray to himself, as he meditatively puffed at his fine havana, "and by good rights I should have been sleeping the sleep of the just and innocent hours ago." The train soon seemed laboring in a heavy sea. The hoarse panting of the engine came throbbing back on the night. The huge Pullman rolled deep, first to one side awhile, then to the other, as it trailed on around the sharp reverse curves of some unseen grade. Out of the darkness to the right and against the northern stars loomed up dim, bulky shapes, and Gray realized that the foot-hills were reached, that the long tortuous climb was beginning. Up, up, higher and higher steamed the straining giant in the lead, the dense smoke-clouds rolling rearward lighted brilliantly every few seconds by the glare from the roaring furnace into which Scut's shovel was heaping coal by the bushel. No. 783 was doing her best, as Long predicted, but even her superb lungs and tempered muscles could barely drag so heavy a burden. Only nine or ten miles an hour was she making now, thought Gray, as once more the sleeper door was opened, and the conductor, followed by a brakeman, bustled in. He glared suspiciously into the dim recess of the smoking-compartment, the brakeman peering over his shoulder.

"Ain't you going to bed to-night?" he asked.

"Presently," yawned Gray, "if I get sleepy."

"Your friend there in the other car hasn't lost much time. He's snoring like he hadn't slept for six weeks. Where'd he say he lived?"

"Pawnee."

"Know him—there?"

"No, nor anybody else."

"Never been out here before?"

Gray was in no mood for talk, much less for cross-examination. He shrugged his broad shoulders impatiently. "Never."

The conductor hesitated, looked long and fixedly at his passenger, studying what he could see of his face, figure, and clothes in that dim light. He turned half reluctantly away, then turned back.

"Well, if you want any sleep before we get to Butte you'd better be getting it," said he, with that broad freedom of manner and absence of conventional restraint begotten of years in the boundless West, and then stood awaiting the result.

It came, not too soothingly or satisfactorily.

"When I want it, I'll take it."

The conductor drew away with distinct sense of another defeat. He stirred up the porter with no gentle touch. "How many of your passengers have got guns?" he asked.

The negro started from his seat, dazed and frightened. "Only two or three of 'em, that I see," was the answer. "That officer in lower 3, and two gentlemen in 8 and 9. What's the matter?"

"Nothing as yet, but I've a good mind to wake the lieutenant," said Jarvis, his fingers working nervously, as he glanced about the car. The porter's eyes were big, his eyeballs staring.

"Wait till I come back," said Mr. Jarvis, presently, and let himself out at the rear door. The last sleeper was dark and silent. Every curtain seemed drawn. Jarvis found his bunch of keys, and after a few seconds' fumble opened the door. The air within was close, almost stifling, for every section was occupied. He found the porter snoring in the smoking-room, stirred him vigorously, and propounded rapid questions. The bewildered darky answered to the point. Some of the young men among his excursionists might have pistols in their grips, but he'd only seen one in a hip pocket. There were ten ladies and twelve men, he said, all unconscious of danger of any kind, and, as it was a chartered car and they were out for a long pleasure-trip, no doubt there was plenty of money, to say nothing of watches and jewelry, in the party. It was the first of the kind that had come up the road for a month. Jarvis knew it had been well advertised. What more likely than that the daring fellows who had made things lively on the other road should have planned to hold up this particular train? What better place could they select than the lonely, rugged, almost mountainous tract between Thunder Gap and Boulder Creek? And if they weren't already boarding his train, one or two at a time, just as they did on the K. P., then call him a Chinaman. That swagger and stylish young man at the Junction, "salooning the soldiers and making himself solid with them," the shivering tramp at Willow Springs who was so promptly found and so lavishly paid for and provided for by the same suspicious party ("Fancy his enlisting!" thought the conductor: "that cock-and-bull story that he told Long was enough to damn him from the start"), and now these two cowboys in the smoker,—fellows that took supper and left their plugs at Hank's and said they were going up to Pawnee for a flyer, but allowed

they knew nobody there, or in that part of the valley. Jarvis felt more uneasy with every minute.

"I'm blessed if I don't think I ought to wake some of the likeliest of these young fellows," said he to the porter; "but I'll go and have out the lieutenant anyhow."

Suiting action to the word, back he went to the forward sleeper. "Wake the gentleman in No. 3," said he to the porter, as he re-entered, and found that dusky guardian eagerly, anxiously awaiting him.

"He's gittin' up, suh. I done called him." And at the moment, rubbing a pair of bleary, sleepy, red-rimmed eyes with one hand and buttoning a cavalry sack-coat with the other, a stocky, heavily built man of about thirty-five came lurching down the aisle. Briefly the conductor told his suspicions and asked what help he could have in case of trouble. The cavalryman was evidently a trifle hard to rouse. He seemed slow of comprehension. He pondered a bit, looking dumbly from the conductor to the porter, with eyes that did not clear as rapidly as they should have done. At last he said,—

"One of them in this car?"

"Yes, smoking in the compartment yonder."

Following the conductor, the officer meandered up the aisle. The Pullman was swaying violently now. The train had reached the summit of the divide and was rushing down the westward slope at a speed that became swifter every moment. The lieutenant stopped at his berth and rummaged under a pillow.

"You're not getting a gun now?" whispered the conductor, warningly.

"No,—only a pocket pistol," was the answer, as the blue blouse straightened up and produced a half-filled flask.

"I wish your men, those recruits, had arms," muttered the conductor, as they went on again. Then he held up a warning hand. They were just squeezing through the narrow passage between the smoking-compartment and the side of the car. "Wait till I see what he's doing," said Jarvis, and disappeared around the corner. Presently he beckoned, and, flask in hand, the lieutenant followed on, glancing casually at the dim form near the window, stepped to the wash-stand and found a tumbler, half filled it with liquor, and proffered it to the conductor, who shook his head. The soldier poured in a little water, and swallowed it all at a gulp.

"Now," said he, "let's have a look at your man."

The conductor stepped inside the smoker, feigning to try to decipher the writing on a card he held in his hand, but, as though the light were too dim, reached up and turned higher the flame, brightly illuminating the little compartment in a moment. Gray may have been dozing. He glanced quickly up, as though startled, and his eyes met those of the stout man in cavalry uniform. For a moment they looked at each other, searchingly and without a word. A flush as of surprise and annoyance began to mount to the civilian's face; a flush that was not of surprise was already manifest on that of the soldier. The conductor glanced from one to the other as though about to speak.

Suddenly the night was rent by one sharp, quick, almost agonized

shriek from the engine, far ahead. Suddenly, so suddenly that it almost hurled Jarvis and the lieutenant off their feet, the air-brakes gripped like a vice, the whizzing wheels instantly checking their way, the smooth, swift motion changed to a jerky, grinding, straining series of bumps. Jarvis, turning white as a sheet, sprang to the door the instant he could recover balance. For six, eight seconds the Pullman went thumping ahead, slower and slower every second, yet still at dangerous speed. Then came a thunderous shock and crash. Gray, whose feet were on the opposite seat, doubled up like a jack-knife, his nose and knees jammed together, the back seat clamped tight against that in front. The lieutenant shot forward out of sight, and was overheard fetching up with a resounding thump against the front door. There was a crackling of window-glass, a sound of stifled shrieks and groans. The big car recoiled some thirty or forty yards, then came to a stand-still, and Mr. Gray, scrambling out from the smoking-compartment, nearly stumbled over the prostrate officer, who was slowly finding his feet. But, following some half-articulate cry for help, Gray darted through the narrow passage-way, into the curtained aisle, now rapidly filling with men, much more dazed than dressed, some of them bleeding from contusions, all of them shaken and scared, and, slowly sliding out of the nearest berth, came a blue-robed, slender, senseless form,—that of the soft-voiced occupant who half an hour earlier had importuned him for water. In an instant Gray stooped, raised her in his arms, bore her through the passage, nearly capsizing the lieutenant the second time, laid her flat upon the long seat in the smoker, and applied his fine cambric handkerchief to a gash in the left temple, from which the blood was oozing.

CHAPTER IV.

A MELANCHOLY scene of wreck and disaster was that which greeted the eyes of Mr. Gray when perhaps half an hour later he stepped from the platform and made his way forward. Through some strange neglect of telegraphic orders from Butte, the conductor and engineer of No. 12 had not been bidden to side-track at Thunder Gap, but had been sent spinning on their way down grade five miles to Alkali Flats, where the road crossed to the northeast and began to climb over the divide to Boulder Creek, and right here, at the end of a straight-away mile of track, the head-light of the Pacific express flashed into view. Each engineer sighted the glaring eye of the other's steed at the same instant. Each sounded his warning cry. Each instantly reversed his lever, reckless of cylinder-heads. Long had vainly sprung the air-brake, and No. 12's brakemen had spun their iron wheels for all they were worth, but still, with the fearful momentum of their down-grade rush, the two trains dashed at each other like maddened bulls, and engineer and fireman, having done all that mortal men could do, jumped for their lives a second or two before the crash. The lighter train of the two, the express, had so far slackened speed that Long and his fireman, landing and rolling in the soft sand, were but

slightly hurt. The engineer of the freight, however, was tumbled heels over head, and then knocked senseless by a flying splinter. The fireman had only just been found as Gray reached the point where the two engines, locked deep in each other's embrace, stood welded together, a tangled mass of metal. The whistle of one of them, dislocated by the shock, was emitting a low, moaning sound, as of some huge beast in agony. The tender of the express had telescoped half its length through the mail-car, and the postal clerk had been hauled from under a confused heap of coal and mail-sacks. The mail-car in turn had smashed in the front of the express, and this, forced flat against the front of the baggage-car, left the messenger a helpless prisoner within his own premises, unable to open even a side door. How the baggage-man escaped death he never could tell. He and his trunks were hurled to the front end of the car, all in a heap, yet, barring damages to clothing and cuticle, he was little the worse for the adventure. Then came the car-load of recruits. Hardly a man of their number had a whole skin left. The seats were wrenched loose, the windows were shattered. The smoker, too, was a sight: its few occupants had been hurled about promiscuously, and were still swearing when Gray got to the front. People in the day-coach were less damaged, but equally dazed, and in the two Pullmans consternation reigned supreme. The excursionists were all sound asleep up to the instant of impact, and those in the upper berths had been tumbled into the aisle, and all the car-load violently shaken. But in the forward Pullman the actual damage was greater. The porter was groaning with a twisted back. Two of the men were badly wrenched. Lieutenant Rawson had a bump as big as a grape-shot on the side of his head. Mrs. Mainwaring, though uninjured, was so terrified as to be worse than helpless, and as for the fair girl with her, she had happened to be awake, had lifted herself on her elbow at the shriek of the whistle, fearful of ill, and almost instantly had been dashed against the edge of the seat and cruelly stunned. Of the freight train, the six cars immediately behind the engine were crushed to fragments, and the fragments hurled far and wide. It was from under a heap of these they lugged the fireman as Gray appeared, and this summed up the damage to person and material, but not to nerves, tempers, or records for piety. The language of Mr. Jarvis and his friend of the freight train beggared description. The cavalry sergeant felt an access of envious respect as he listened. Lieutenant Rawson invited both to have a drink, and this time it was accepted.

It was a five-mile stretch up to the Gap, and much more than that back to Boulder, but news of the mishap had to be sent and help summoned. It was then that Gray's shabby tramp had come to the fore. He had been warmed, fed, and rested, as he had not been for a week. He was used to walking, he said, and offered to carry the conductor's pencilled despatch. It should have been sent by a brakeman of the freight, but both were lamed and badly bruised. Jarvis looked more than uncertain at first, but finally gave the man the important paper. Twenty minutes later, the two cowboys, despite bangs and bruises, declared that they too would "hoof it," and pushed ahead through the

pallid dawn. Gray, silent and observant, appeared just as they departed, and found the lieutenant, the two conductors, and the cavalry sergeant in a quadrangular council. At sight of the new-comer Jarvis cautioned silence, and dissolved the meeting.

The girl whom Gray had so promptly and tenderly cared for had recovered consciousness within five minutes. She looked up, dazed and startled, into the strange face bending over her, and then almost instantly asked for Mrs. Mainwaring.

"She is unhurt," said Gray, quietly. "Don't worry. You have quite a bruise here on the side of your head. Please lie still until I check the bleeding. Mrs. Mainwaring will be back in a moment."

Mrs. Mainwaring had been there, half distracted, wringing her hands and laughing and crying by turns, and was now lying in her berth, being ministered to by some sympathetic woman from the other car. Another had come to aid Gray, but, seeing how deftly he bathed and stanched the wound, she confined her attentions to wetting towels and passing them to the strange gentleman. So skilful were his ministrations that the young lady presently declared herself able to sit up and walk, and insisted on seeing Mrs. Mainwaring. She was assisted to her feet, and, leaning on his arm, was taken to her friend. Gray left her there, slipped quietly away, and came forth, his heart beating with odd emotion.

The next thing he found to do was to help straighten out the fireman of the freight, who was shaking like an aspen, completely demoralized and almost crying. He, too, had struck soft sand when he leaped from the train, but after a somersault or two had been buried under an avalanche of splintered board, distributed from the roofs, sides, and flooring of the shattered cars. The heavy trucks, wheels, and beams fortunately had not been hurled more than a dozen yards from the track, but kindling-wood in distracting quantities had been showered far and near. The handsome silver-topped flask, so admired of the sergeant at the Junction, was promptly produced, and the fireman took a long, long pull. Then Gray bethought him of his tramp. The recruits and passengers mingling in confused knot with the damaged men were still grouped about the wreck, some detailing personal impressions and experiences, some noisy and nervous, others silent and doubtless thankful for their escape, others still thinking only of the injured. Of these latter was Gray, at whom the conductor was scowling suspiciously the while, and saying something in a low tone to the lieutenant.

"Do you know what became of that poor fellow we picked up at Willow Springs?" asked Gray of the brakeman, who was ruefully contemplating a ruined lantern. The man looked up instantly, but, instead of answering, turned and glanced significantly at the conductor.

"If you want him," said the latter, coolly, "you'll have to follow the track five miles or more. Perhaps you knew the two that went after him. Birds of a feather, I take it,—bound for the Gap and a spree on what's left of that ten-dollar bill."

"I'm very glad to hear he isn't hurt," said Gray. "You've sent for help, I presume?"

"I've sent a message by that tramp friend of yours, if that's what you mean. None of my crew or the freight could walk a mile."

All this time Lieutenant Rawson stood aloof, his forage-cap pulled down over his brows, intently eying the stylishly dressed man in tweeds. Gray became conscious of the scrutiny, and it annoyed him. Of the passengers in the day-coach none were men whom he would have been at all likely to meet on equal terms in his past. Among those of the forward sleeper only two or three appeared to be men of education or social standing, and they were nursing their bruises back in the lavatory. The young fellows of the rear Pullman were laughing and chatting noisily together as they rummaged about the wreck. The officer was the one man aboard the train whom ordinarily Gray would have felt inclined to address. But while the uniform and the assurance of at least a certain social standing on the part of its wearer attracted him, there was that in Rawson's face which repelled. Nor was this wholly due to the fact that it lacked refinement and was a trifle bloated,—that the eyes were somewhat dull and clouded; but in them Gray read unerringly an expression of distrust, even of hostility, and the pugnacious in him was aroused at once.

All of a sudden he recalled that the porter had told him Mrs. Mainwaring was an army lady; so, doubtless, was the young lady with her. Very possibly the lieutenant was their escort, and the escort was wrathful over his usurpation of an escort's functions, so far as the damsel was concerned. Gray could not remember the officer's busying himself in any way to aid Mrs. Mainwaring. True, he was still half stunned, and was bathing his bruises, while Gray was caring for the very attractive if somewhat dishevelled girl in the pale-blue wrapper. Something in the contemplation of his loneliness and isolation during the earlier night—a man without a home, the would-be sharer of the fireman's seat, the companion of the rude soldiery, the aider and abettor of tramps—and the exaltation of his present, tickled his sense of the humorous. Had he not won the gratitude, the almost effusive thanks, of Mrs. Mainwaring, the eloquent, if silent, recognition of a very pretty girl, and now the undoubted jealousy and dislike of an army officer? "There's some fun left in life, even now," was his grim comment, as he calmly studied Rawson's reddening face, gazing speculatively into the latter's shifting eyes until uneasily they turned away.

The gray dawn was sheeting the slopes about them, and farther to the west the mountain-tops loomed, dim, pallid, and white with snow. Fine, soft flakes were sifting down even here, and Long's prediction was being verified. That faithful soldier of his country and "the Road" was now stretched on the flat of his back on the floor of the baggage-car, with some car-seats for mattress, pluckily stifling the moan of pain that would have forced itself through his set teeth. To him came the younger soldier, the sergeant, full of sympathy.

"You're badly shaken, Mr. Long: wouldn't a little whiskey help you?" said he, the cavalry cure-all of the old days most naturally suggesting itself.

"I don't know but what it would," groaned the engineer. "The lieutenant has some, hasn't he?"

"Yes, *he* has," was the half-hesitant reply. Then the freemasonry of the craft seemed to show in the look that followed, half comical, half confiding, but all significant. "But—he ain't the sort of man I'd ask for anything. 'Tain't like as if it was Captain Ray or Blake or Truscott or any of them was here, you know. But—I can find you some all right."

And, jumping from the car, Sergeant Kearney went straight to Mr. Gray. "Our engineer, sir," said he, "is badly stove up. Could you oblige me with a little whiskey?"

"Certainly," said Gray, going down into his pocket and fishing up the silver-topped flask. "Give him a good swig, and, sergeant, help yourself."

The sergeant grinned, thanked him, hurried back to his new friend, and gave him what he called an honest cavalry four fingers.

"God!" said Long, smacking his lips, his eyes snapping. "That was an old-timer." Then, as the potent liquor, long a stranger to his once casehardened system, began glowingly to assert itself, he blinked his gratitude and looked admiringly at the handsome flask. "That's a swell stopper you've got to that canteen, sergeant. Where'd you capture it?"

"Tall young fellow in the first sleeper. Seems to have money and whiskey, cigars and good nature, till you can't rest," said Kearney, in the vernacular of the day, and was surprised at Long's sudden interest. The engineer braced himself up on an elbow, all eagerness.

"Smooth face, with light moustache, regular six-footer, slim, broad-shouldered, travelling-cap and big ulster?"

"That's the feller. Treated half my squad to pie and coffee back there at the Junction. No end of a swell, I—— Why, what's amiss? Say, I wouldn't take another drink just now, would you?" he broke off, anxiously, for Long was reaching for the flask.

"I want to see the monogram, or whatever you call it, on that silver stopper. D'ye know what I think of that feller? He's first-cousin or twin brother to the foxiest gang of bank- and train-robbers in the whole country, and if we hadn't run over or run our nose slap into No. 12 right here at Alkali Flats, I'm betting my bottom dollar we'd have found his gang waiting for us back of Thunder Gap."

Kearney drew back, startled. Long had seized the flask, and was studying the stopper with keen interest. No wonder he couldn't decipher it. There was no monogram. Instead there was a queer-shaped shield with diagonal lines and odd little figures, like tiny leaves, cut on the surface, and above it was the paw of an animal grasping a dagger, and there was a scroll with some words in a foreign tongue, Long knew not what. He searched the cup of silver that fitted on the base, but that was smooth and polished. The red Russia leather covering also bore no mark.

"That don't look like a train-robber," said Kearney, pointing to the device on the top of the stopper. "Ain't that what you call a coat of arms, or something?"

"Exactly; and what's an American doing with a coat of arms? He's lifted it from some dook or other, touring through the West for buffalo and Indians. He's a slick one, sergeant, but he can't fool me. Why, he just gave himself dead away when he told me he wanted to ride up with me and Scut in the cab, pretending he was out here to enlist in the cavalry and wanted to talk with me about the officers that were coming there to Ransom. Yes, sir." And Long grinned sardonically, despite his pain.

Kearney's answer was a long whistle of amazement.

"You'd never have got me to believe it if he hadn't made that break. Fancy a swell like him a-grooming horses and cleaning out stalls. Hush," suddenly lowering his voice, for at the instant Mr. Gray came briskly into the car.

The dawn was so far advanced that the night-lights were no longer needed and were burning blear and dim. The battered baggage-man, in no pleasant humor, because an excursionist from the rear Pullman, with ill-timed jocularity, had asked him how he liked the taste of his own medicine, was muttering profane comment on excursionists in general and this one in particular, as he took down the nearest lamp and extinguished it. Gray's tall figure, bereft now of the ulster, was outlined against the brighter light at the rear door as he entered, and Long turned his head and stared at him curiously. For a moment, coming as he did from the outer air where it was now almost broad daylight, though the sun was not yet peeping over the eastern horizon, the new-comer was not quite sure whether the dark object on the floor was or was not the engineer, but he spoke cheerily.

"I'm looking for Mr. Long," he said. "I hear he's badly wrenched. Ah, there you are. How are you feeling?"

"As well as a man can who's turned half a dozen somersaults in the mud. You can thank God you didn't get aboard the cab."

"I can indeed," laughed Gray. "I've never practised mounting and dismounting at a gallop from a locomotive, though I've tried it often enough from my horse."

Mr. Long winked expressively at Kearney, as though he would say, "Now watch out for a lie," and promptly popped the question.

"So you thought you'd join the cavalry on that account, did you?"

And, to the amazement of Sergeant Kearney and the incredulous disdain of Mr. Long, the calm reply was, "That's what I'm going to Butte for. I expect to be at squad drill in a day or two. Possibly the sergeant here will be giving me my setting up," said he, turning frankly and smilingly to Kearney.

"You talk as though you knew the drill already, sir," said the sergeant, still unable to credit the statement, yet powerless against the gay, frank good humor of the civilian; "and it isn't the likes of you that generally take a blanket."

"Oh, I used to shoulder arms in the militia," laughed Gray, "and do the four exercises, but I'm green as any recruit in your party, as you'll probably find out, if you're going to Ransom."

Kearney looked at Long, and Long glared at Kearney. This was simply too brazen a fraud for the engineer's patience.

"Do you mean to tell me a man who wears clothes like them and carries a flask like this can't find any easier way of making a living?" said he.

"Positive fact," laughed Gray, debonair as before. "I'm at the end of my tether, or soon will be, and I've come all the way out here for no other purpose."

"Why didn't you save your money and 'list in the East, where you came from?" asked Long, prodding Kearney with his toe to call attention to his astuteness.

"For the simplest of reasons. Had I enlisted there they might have sent me to any regiment, whereas I wanted a particular one,—the —th, in fact."

Long had lost another point, but rallied. His tone was gruff as Mainwaring's as he returned to the attack: "One would suppose a feller—a man like you could command influence enough to get assigned to any regiment he wanted. That ain't much of a trick."

"No," answered Gray, as he seated himself on the conductor's big wooden chest and carelessly swung his slender foot; "no, I don't believe I've got either friends or influence, or anything in the wide world, but—what I've got on and what's in an old trunk somewhere along the road here."

"Didn't you say something about quitting railroading to take up soldiering?" queried Long, so astonished that he was forgetting his pain.

"I did. Two years ago I did some railroading at the general manager's end of the line. So you see how little I must have known about it. Yes," he went on, with twinkling eyes, "I used to ride my own horse, but I've lost him, so it's got to be one of Uncle Sam's."

For a moment nothing further was said. A pair of frank blue eyes were gazing smilingly down into the engineer's face, and that ex-trooper could find no excuse for another expression of doubt. Slowly he held forth the half-emptied flask.

"Here," said he, "take this. I'm damned if you're not too many for me. But," a sudden thought striking him, "why don't you sell this and your watch and them clothes and go to the mines and make a stake there?"

"Because I'd rather soldier, man," was the smiling answer,—Gray's good humor was indomitable,—"and down in the bottom of your heart you know perfectly well you never see the uniform," and here he laid a hand on Kearney's shoulder, "that you don't more than half wish you were in it again and riding the trail or the prairie rather than the iron track. I don't have to sell anything yet," he added, with almost a laugh. "Keep the whiskey, Mr. Long. You've more need of it than I have. I'll see you again after a while." And with that he rose, and, nodding smilingly to Kearney, sauntered from the car.

"Well, if that's a train-robber," said the latter, as he reached and took the flask from Long's unresisting hand, "here's"—the top came off and the flask was lifted to his lips—"here's long life to him."

Late that morning the relief train came down from Pawnee, the East-bound express at its heels. Passengers and baggage were labo-

riously transferred from one train to the other around the scene of the wreck. Mr. Long, bidding mournful adieu to No. 783, asked Sergeant Kearney to see that the now empty flask was returned to the tall feller that talked of enlisting. "He may talk till hell freezes over," said Long, "but not till I see him in uniform will I believe he isn't lying, and even then I'll misdoubt him for a reformed train-robber or an escaped lunatic."

But of this and other unflattering comments Mr. Gray was unconscious. By eight o'clock some railway-men arrived from the Gap on a hand-car, proving that the suspected tramp had at least delivered his despatches. People were getting hungry by that time, and it presently transpired that "the tall gent" in the first sleeper was going back with the hand-car to see what he could buy and send to them, as it would be noon perhaps before the wrecking-train, etc., could come. Then the porter addressed Mr. Gray with a message. Mrs. Mainwaring begged to see the gentleman before he started.

She was calm and collected now, and evidently ashamed of the trouble she had given. The young lady was seated by an open window, languidly drinking in the fresh air, a silken handkerchief bound about her head.

"We are so very much indebted to you," said the matron, rising at the entrance of the young man, "and both my niece, Miss Leroy, and I wished to thank you before we parted. I am Mrs. Mainwaring, and my husband, Major Mainwaring, whom I expect to meet to-day, will be glad to add his thanks to mine, if you will kindly give me your address."

"I assure you the thanks are unnecessary. I am only too happy to have been of the faintest service. I am awfully clumsy, I fear," said Gray, smiling, as his eyes wandered to Miss Leroy's face. She was leaning forward now and extending the pretty white hand he had so admired much earlier that morning.

"And I want to say, yet I don't know how to say, how very much I thank you," she murmured, her words falling hesitatingly, "and—— Pray, do not think me impertinent, but did I not see you—were you not on the Rhine last May?"

His whole manner seemed to change instantly. Quiet good humor and courtesy gave place to embarrassment, even awkwardness.

"It was—possibly a brother of mine," he faltered. "I—I hope you'll have a very pleasant journey. Such ill luck thus far, you know——" He barely touched the extended hand. "Good-by. Good-by, Mrs. Mainwaring. They—they're waiting for me with that hand-car." And in an instant he was hastening away.

"But you haven't told us your name or your address," persisted the elder lady.

"Oh, it's of no consequence.—You remember Mr. Toots, don't you?" he called back over his shoulder, as he made his escape from the car. But on the platform without the flitting smile vanished, and his face grew gray and sad, as he stopped and took a long, long breath.

"Lesson number one, and a tough one, Darcy, my boy," he panted. "My God, what *is* my name to be now?"

CHAPTER V.

THE —th had been having what Captain Ray called a "poky" time most of that year, and when Ray's usually sunny nature clouded over something was sure to be amiss with the professional side of the man. His domestic side was perennial joy. The regiment had known many a hard winter, many a fierce summer, many a sharp campaign and savage battle. Its long exile in Arizona in the old days was full of peril and suffering. Its sometimes desperate encounters with the red warriors of the northern plains and mountains had made sad inroads on its membership. Its records of casualties embraced every conceivable catastrophe: death by sunstroke, starvation, freezing, lightning, flood, fire, rattlesnakes, explosions, thirst, arrow and tomahawk, shot, sabre, and shell. A peaceful year it never knew from the day of its first muster on the plains of Texas until a quarter-century after, when, *mirabile dictu*, there hadn't even been a horse-thief to follow or an Indian to chase until, late in the summer, it occurred to a band of Cheyennes to ride northward and call on some kindred up in the Powder River country, and these children of nature never thought of asking anybody's leave. The —th had been having, as Ray said, so poky a time at Russell—just drilling, drilling, drilling on that wide sweep of upland prairie, instead of scouting and fighting through the mountains, their normal summer recreation—that the regiment shouted for very joy when it heard that Sharp-Knife, the young Hotspur that headed the raid, had soundly thrashed the first detachment sent to head him off, and, indignant at the discourtesy of the Great Father in essaying to curb his inclination to roam, was helping himself to all the horned cattle, horses, and household goods that lay in his way, not to mention a few of the households, and was careering onward bound for a big time in the Big Horn Mountains, bragging to the Northern Cheyennes of the fun he had had.

Then away went Colonel Atherton, with Stannard and Mainwaring, the old and the new majors, and eight "husky" troops, full tilt for the Hills, only to find when they reached the broad valley of the Ska that Sharp-Knife and his shifty followers had crossed forty-eight hours ahead and were circling westward across the Little Missouri by that time. Never is a stern chase so long a chase as when the Indian has the lead. The department commander followed by rail, stage-coach, and buckboard, and half the troops in the Territories of Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming were centring on the Cheyennes, when Sharp-Knife cut loose from all semblance of a base and took to the woods in earnest. His people scattered to the four winds. Some hid among the northern bands of the same tribe, some slipped in among the Sioux at the great reservations in Dakota, others scattered far and wide, broke up into little squads of three or four and even less, and jogged back by circuitous routes to the southern plains and swore they'd only been hunting along the Arkansas. There's only one creature that can beat an Indian,—murder one minute and look the image of piety the next,—and that's a cat. It *was* "a poky summer," said Ray, at Russell. It was poor kind of campaigning, said that same authority, but

better than none. It was the move that followed that stirred the social fabric of the —th to its foundations. The regiment had been stationed for some years at Russell, a big post on the Union Pacific, but the department commander decided that he wanted Atherton and his seasoned campaigners closer to the malcontents, and, to the unspeakable—not speechless—indignation of nine-tenths of the ladies in the —th and the financial, though unconfessed, comfort of many of their lords, the order was issued that it should not return to Russell, but direct its retrograde march on the older, smaller, but just now rather more important post of Fort Ransom.

"Squeeze into quarters as best you can," said the general, cheerfully, "and you won't mind crowding this winter. We'll fit you out better in the spring."

Now, the winter was the time they most objected to being crowded, for then they had their friends from the East and their social pleasures, did these dames and damsels of the army, while in summer the troops were almost always afield, and the women, those who could afford it, went East. Few had done so this year, because the regiment was not sent out for summer camp, and when the Sharp-Knife chase was ordered it was too late in the season.

So the two battalions, then so called, marched in to Ransom. Then, so many at a time, the officers were allowed to go to Russell to supervise the packing and shipment of their household goods, while the quartermaster and other sergeants did as much for the companies. Mrs. Atherton, with her lares and penates, was there at Butte to welcome the regiment when it arrived. Mrs. Mainwaring, with her fair niece, Miss Leroy, was to have been there, but, as we have seen, became involved in a collision in the mountain division. The major hurried eastward to meet his helpmate at Pawnee, and there got full details of the crash, and sought among the passengers for the young man in the ulster and travelling-cap who had been so helpful in time of need, but he had disappeared, said the conductor who took Mr. Jarvis's load. The last seen of him he was taking dinner at Ford's restaurant with a couple of cowboys and a dilapidated party who had been fellow-passengers with him on No. 3 at the time of the wreck. Then the cowboys had gone one way and the young man another. Sergeant Kearney, who under Lieutenant Rawson was in charge of the recruits, said, begging the new major's pardon, that the conductor and engineer of No. 3 were sure there was something queer about that party. It was believed they were all connected with a gang of train-robbers. Whereat the major scoffed until Rawson came up and corroborated what Kearney had said, and was presented by the major to his wife and Miss Leroy, who were not over-cordial. Women learn so much more about their fellow-passengers in the course of a few hours than do men. Then the major, in his happy way, went on to chaff the wife of his bosom upon her having nearly captured a train-robber, and then Miss Leroy spoke her mind. She didn't believe a word of it.

At Butte, where they arrived late at night, while the major was bustling about after the ambulance and baggage-wagons, Mrs. Main-

waring, sitting at an open window and gazing out at the flitting lights on the platform and awaiting the summons to leave the car, was suddenly attracted by the sight of a little detachment of recruits marching by. The young lady, too, was at a near window, and the sergeant, catching a glimpse of her face, remembered the conversation he had heard at Pawnee and her prompt defence of the absent, and he had felt ill at ease and shame-stricken ever since. What right had he to brand a man as a criminal on the mere suspicion of some railway employees? The young lady's spirited stand in defence of the defamed had astonished the major and delighted Kearney. A sudden thought struck the honest trooper, as he was marching by, and, springing quickly to the side of the car, he held up to the window the handsome silver-topped flask. "I beg pardon," said he, "but this belongs to that young gentleman. I was to have given it to him, but I've got to return to St. Louis to the recruiting dépôt, and he's stopped back there about Pawnee. He never came on this train at all, but he declared he was coming up to Fort Ransom later. Would you please give it to him, miss?"

And, before she knew what to say, the sergeant was gone, and there she sat with the stranger's flask in her gloved hand,—the stranger whom she could have sworn she saw at Bonn and Cologne not four months before,—who thought it might have been his brother, who wouldn't give his name, but who had forgotten the handkerchief with which he had stanched the flow of blood from her temple,—an unsightly relic at the moment, to be sure, but safely stowed in her little satchel for all that, and already searched, and not vainly, for a trace of ownership. Bathed in her own blood were the letters D. H. G.

And what on earth she was to do with that handsome flask and that once more presentable handkerchief was a problem that confronted Miss Leroy two weeks later, after she had begun to feel reasonably at home at Ransom. It was the queerest phase of life that ever she had encountered. City-bred, convent-educated, she found frontier ways at an army post as full of novelty and sensation as her first explorations in foreign parts. For two or three days they had lived at the hotel in Butte until the major reported the carpets down and the stoves up. The next two or three were devoted to unpacking furniture, pictures, glass, and crockery, and putting everything where it belonged and much where it didn't. It seemed to make little difference, for in all these functions, at all hours of the day, and not a few of the night, the young officers, in shirt-sleeves and the best of spirits, bore willing part. Such gay good humor, such utter lack of stiffness and conventionality, she had never seen. All drills and duties, it seemed, except the necessary guard, police, and stables, were suspended until officers and men were comfortably housed and settled down. The bachelor lieutenants pitched tents on the parade and placidly awaited their turn to choose quarters, a ceremony which impressed Miss Leroy as something incomprehensible. It was not easy to make her realize just why Captain Ray couldn't move Mrs. Ray and the baby boys up from the hotel until Captain Freeman had chosen, and why Mrs. Blake should remain at Cheyenne near her own old home until the

Truscotts and Rays had settled on what houses they would take. (They wanted the big double brick next but one to the colonel's, but were afraid to move in, lest the new surgeon ordered out from Omaha should take a fancy to that very set.) It was all plain sailing, as she could see, for the colonel, the two majors, and the two senior captains, but then came the tug of war. The Greggs had moved into No. 5, confident the doctor would prefer the other side of the garrison, the very house the Truscotts and Rays thought to occupy together, but the doctor came, saw, and concluded that the house he and Mrs. Doctor wanted was No. 5 and no other, whereat Mrs. Gregg was furious, and the captain philosophic. "I told you so, M'riar," he was unfeeling enough to say a dozen times a day, until she flew to the Stannards for sympathy. It seemed to Miss Leroy that whether these families got settled or not the feuds never would be; and yet in less than ten days even the young married couples were snugly stowed away. Smiles and sunshine met her on every side. The men, who looked like hairy monsters at first, had shaved their beards and donned their neatly fitting uniforms. The band played every afternoon. Parades were fine, guard-mounting "lovely." The little dinners and suppers and dances were just as jolly, friendly, and delightful as could possibly be. Many of the young matrons were charming companions. Several of the young officers danced divinely, all of them rode well, and none of them thought anything of coming banging at the hall door at any hour of the day to ask Mrs. Mainwaring to come and do this or Miss Leroy to come and see that. The ladies ran in and out from house to house as though it were one big family, and before the 10th of November came Miss Leroy found herself completely carried away by the life and swing and movement that seemed to characterize everything that went on in the old regiment. She was on the pleasantest of terms with Mesdames Ray, Truscott, and Blake. She found her aunt tireless as a hostess. She admired the colonel and his accomplished wife. She "took" to Mrs. Stannard from the start, and wondered why Mrs. Mainwaring didn't enthuse over her as everybody else did. She liked bluff old Stannard and most of the officers thoroughly, and so, blithe, busy, "on the go," as they said, from morn till late at night, she had well-nigh ceased to think of the shock she had sustained on the night of the collision or to speculate about the tall young gentleman who had restored her to consciousness and to whom she had not restored the handkerchief and flask, when the 10th of November came, and with it her birthday, a new sensation, and an excitement at the fort.

The recruits brought to Ransom by Lieutenant Rawson were for distribution to those troops of the regiment most in need of new blood, and, as luck would have it, these were all of the battalion at Fort Fred Winthrop, an outlying post close to the now crowded reservation of the Sioux. Thither had Atherton ordered Rawson without delay of a day, partly because recruits were needed, but mainly because the lieutenant showed symptoms of an oncoming attack of a bibulous character, and Atherton would have none of that in his garrison. Rawson was ordered northward forthwith, and marched with his

Johnny Raws at dawn next day, and, except for the voice of one crying in the wilderness that the party had looted the groggery of Laramie Pete at the Dry Fork of the Ska, nothing more was heard of them till they joined at Winthrop, none the worse for their wintry march. Ray had looked over the array and decided that he could afford to wait and pick for himself. Sergeant Kearney had gone back to the recruiting dépôt. The regimental adjutant had been designated as recruiting officer at the station, and had disdainfully rejected, one after another, half a dozen seedy-looking tramps, when one day, perhaps the fifth after their arrival at the post, the sergeant-major put his handsome head into the office, followed it in, carefully shut the door behind him, stood scrupulously at attention, and hemmed behind his hand to attract his superior's notice.

Mr. Dana looked up from the tangled mass of figures at the foot of his regimental return, laid down his pen, and said, "Well?"

"Will the adjutant see a man that wants to enlist?"

"Not if he's like the lot that have been here so far."

"He isn't, sir, but I don't know about him."

"What's the matter? I haven't time to waste if he isn't good enough to suit us." And Dana glanced out along the wooden porch as though in search of the would-be trooper.

"He's good enough, I don't doubt, sir," said the sergeant-major, a half-smile breaking about the corners of his mouth, "as far as looks go; but I never knew fellows like this one to enlist that didn't have something wrong with 'em, and he says he wants to take on with Captain Ray."

"He'll take on where we see fit to put him," said Dana, with the dogmatism of the service. "Let's see the gentleman who wants to dictate where he'll go."

So the sergeant-major opened the door, jerked his head backward in encouragement to the invisible party in the outer office, and said, "Come in."

There stepped quickly into the room a young man about six feet tall, erect and athletic in build and carriage, with a fine, clear-cut, frank face, crowned with a crop of curly, close-cut, light brown hair, with very deep blue eyes, large and clear, under heavy brows, and thick, long, curling lashes, a curly blond moustache sweeping out at the ends and barely hiding the curve of his handsomely chiselled lips, chin and jaws cleanly shaved, throat powerful, open and bare, for the rolling collar of a brand-new blue flannel shirt was confined only by a loosely knotted tie of silk. The coat he wore was a sort of double-breasted pea-jacket of dark blue beaver, now thrown open in deference to the warmth of the room, but the first significant, if not suspicious, thing the young man did as he entered was to begin buttoning it throughout. Snugly fitting trousers of dark blue, belted at the waist, stout, slender, well-made shoes, and a soft black crush hat, completed his attire. As Dana looked at him in some surprise, the new-comer brought his heels together, and between him and the foremost non-commissioned officer in the —th the expert eye could hardly have told which was the more soldierly in build and carriage.

For a moment no one spoke. It was Dana who finally broke silence.

"Why——you've served before."

"Only in a militia regiment, sir."

"Where?"

"In New York City."

The adjutant had a dozen more questions on the tip of his tongue, and the visitor saw it.

"I have answered that, sir, because I presume I have to account for standing attention, but there are many questions that may occur to you that I do not wish to answer. If I may speak with Captain Ray I think I can satisfy him without going into particulars."

Dana whipped his wooden chair around and squarely confronted the speaker. That he was a man of education and social position in the past, at least, Dana saw at a glance, and just as quickly did the companion thought flash across his mind, "Another case of the prodigal son." Incredulity as to the motives of a man in enlisting in those days was not confined to the rank and file.

"Captain Ray may or may not be satisfied, but in either event, as recruiting officer of the regiment, I have to be," said the young officer, with a touch of asperity in his tone. It was not good to his ears to be told that a would-be recruit declined to answer questions.

The new-comer, far from looking disconcerted, smiled affably and frankly. His blue eyes twinkled, his white teeth gleamed. "The best-looking scapegrace that ever came to us. Confound his impudence for grinning," said Dana to himself.

"That is why I wish to speak with Captain Ray, sir," said the civilian. "He might be able to satisfy you when I, probably, could not."

"I don't know how you make that out," said Dana, curiosity betraying him into a half-argument with the applicant, which Dana very well knew was *infra dig.*

"Possibly Captain Ray will explain it," was the answer, and the serenity of the applicant remained unruffled.

"Oh, very well," said Dana, nettled in spite of his better nature. "Go see Captain Ray if you wish."

But even as he spoke the hall door opened and in burst Major Mainwaring. There is no other way of describing the major's method of entering a room. It has been said that he was blunt both in speech and in action. A soldier for years of his life, no amount of domestic polish had ever succeeded in smoothing off the rough edges of the camp. Mainwaring prided himself on being direct in everything he said and did. Men and women who knew him well knew there was a mine of genuine kindness and goodness under the rugged surface. Men and women who heard him speak for the first time declared him a brute.

"What you got here?" blurted Mainwaring, glaring at the sergeant-major and his silent companion.

"Man wants to enlist, sir," was the reply.

Now, Mainwaring was not the recruiting officer of the regiment.

He was in no wise responsible for their selection. He had been but a few months a member of the regiment himself, having, as has been explained, been promoted to it from another when Major Barry became lieutenant-colonel; but it was a peculiarity of Mainwaring's that he considered it his inalienable right to have a say in everything going on, and it wasn't so much what he said as how he said it that made it obnoxious. He scowled at the very presentable new-comer as though words were inadequate to express his disapprobation, then gruffly demanded,—

"Where you from?"

A flush went up to the forehead of the young man, and there was an instant's hesitation; then in a very quiet tone he replied, "The East."

Major Mainwaring was studying him sharply, a suspicious light in his black eyes. "Haven't I seen you before?" he presently asked, the words tumbling all over one another's heels.

"Not out here, certainly," was the tempered reply, though the blue eyes were firing up and looking squarely into the kindling black.

"Do you mean to tell me you haven't been in service before?" The major's precipitate style of questioning left barely time for answer.

But the civilian took his time and chose his words. "I do not mean to tell you—anything, sir."

For a moment Mainwaring simply glared as though he could not realize the full significance of the words.

"What in thunder do you mean by that?" he finally growled.

"Just what I have said, sir," was the reply. "Five minutes ago I wished to enlist in this regiment; now I don't. Good-day to you, gentlemen." And, to the speechless amaze of the sergeant-major, the suppressed delight of Dana, and the profane astonishment of Mainwaring, he calmly walked past the two officers, replacing his hat as he did so, stalked deliberately into the hall-way and out of the front door.

"Well, of all the chip-on-the-shoulder specimens I ever saw," loudly laughed Mainwaring, "that fellow beats the lot. What do you s'pose fired him off so? I hadn't begun to say anything to him. The man's a dash-dashed double-dashed liar, and I know it. I've seen him somewhere before, and *he* knows it, and he's afraid to show up again, and took the first excuse to get off. That man's a dash-dashed deserter, or a horse-thief, or something. He knows me, and didn't know of my promotion to this regiment or my being here. You are well rid of him, Dana. He'll never show up at Ransom again."

But he did, for just two days later Captain Ray came cheerily into the office with enlistment papers in his hand. "Dana, old boy, I've got a tip-top man to be sworn in.—This way, please, Hunter." And there at the door-way stood the applicant of two days before.

Dana glanced over the papers. "Arthur Hunter, born New York, by occupation a clerk, do hereby acknowledge to have voluntarily enlisted this sixth day of November, 188–, as a soldier in the army of the United States, etc., etc., and do solemnly swear that I am twenty-five years and seven months of age, etc., etc., and I, Arthur Hunter,

do solemnly swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America, etc., etc."

Then Dana looked up at the dark eyes and curling black moustache and animated face of one of the crack captains in the regiment, and from him to the silent, blue-eyed, and, as before, thoroughly presentable stranger, and there was embarrassment in the adjutant's face. For a moment he hesitated, then turned to the would-be recruit.

"Will you step outside a moment? I have to speak with Captain Ray."

He was instantly obeyed.

"I beg your pardon, captain," said Dana, "but I have to ask a question or two. Major Mainwaring is sure he has seen this man before, and that he is a deserter or something disreputable despite his good looks. He refused to answer for himself two days ago."

"Yes, I know," answered Ray, smilingly. "We all know how suave and encouraging the major is apt to be to strangers. It's a wonder some wild Westerner hasn't put a bullet through him. I've heard all about that interview."

"And—you're willing to take chances? You're satisfied this man's all right?"

"All right as men go, Dana. We can't expect all the 'vartues and timperance besides for thirteen dollars a month,' as Mulligan said in the Mexican war. But this applicant satisfies me that he means to serve, that he loves a horse, and can ride like a Kentuckian. I'll bet he can fight, and it's none of our business who he is, where he hails from, or why he enlisted, so long as he does his duty. Now I'm willing to take him."

And that settled it. Recruit Arthur Hunter was formally accepted as a member of the sorrel troop, took his first lesson with the curry-comb and brush without a word, and, "without turning a hair," his initiation on Buckler, the meanest brute in the stable, and rode him barebacked to water despite furious plunges and wild howls of delight from threescore trooper throats. Furthermore, Hunter accepted barrack fare without remark and barrack chaff without remonstrance, and when forty-eight hours elapsed and his captain asked him how he liked it, the new trooper clicked his heels together and said, "Better than I hoped to, sir," and then surprised that officer by a request to be allowed to be absent until next day. Etiquette required that such favors should be asked through the first sergeant in writing. The colonel's consent had also to be given, but Hunter produced in explanation a telegram received but half an hour before stables. That despatch was addressed properly to Trooper A. Hunter, Fort Ransom, and said, "Must move to-night. Will bring your things on No. 3," and it came from Pawnee.

Captain Ray looked it over in some uncertainty. "What things are these?" he asked.

"A trunk, sir, and some other property, principally clothing."

Colonel Atherton did not look over-pleased at the application of Captain Ray for permission for a new recruit to be absent over-night, but Ray was a favorite. Sergeant Merriweather was going to Butte on

pass after supper; Recruit Hunter could go with him in the post-trader's wagon. Ray felt sure of his man, and the colonel consented.

And so it happened that Merriweather's pretty wife, the invalid of a fortnight agone, was surprised by the sight of a tall, very fine-looking young man, in a new fatigue suit not yet altered to fit him, who appeared at the door-way of her little abode shortly after gun-fire and asked for the sergeant.

"He'll be here directly. Surely this must be Mr. Hunter," said she, dusting a chair and looking up at him from under her long lashes. "You'll come in and wait, won't you?" she added, invitingly. But Hunter thanked her briefly and said he'd go to the store, which he did, with her bright eyes following him in lively curiosity.

It was midnight when Sergeant Merriweather, driving in, reported his return at the guard-house and found the officer of the day and half the guard searching busily about the premises in hopes of discovering by what means two general prisoners had sawed their way out of their iron-barred room. The rest of the guard were in pursuit. It was a night of excitement and disgust for most of them, and they were all wide awake and eager for news when, at the break of day, there came galloping out from Butte the local agent of the Transcontinental, with a startling story. Train No. 3, "The Owl," the Pacific express, had been held up by robbers about an hour earlier, just east of Ska Bridge. Jimmy Long, engineer of 783, was badly shot. His fireman was killed. The robbers, nearly a dozen in number, had terrorized the train-hands, got everything there was in the safe, in the mail-car, and among the passengers in the day-coach and sleeper, and had then ridden off northwestward across the Ska. They were heading for the Dry Fork. The sheriff was trying to raise a posse in town, but it was slow work. For God's sake, couldn't the cavalry go in pursuit?

CHAPTER VI.

A Territorial governor is not an awe-inspiring official ordinarily, but the governor of Wyoming, relieved of his valuables at the point of the pistol, was not slow in seeking redress. From Butte he wired full particulars of the robbery to the department commander, who was at Pawnee, just back from an inspection of the Sioux agencies, fifty miles to the north. The general was waiting for the East-bound train at the dépôt hotel, was aroused in an instant, and lost no time in wiring authority to Colonel Atherton to use any means in his power to head off and capture the robbers, without waiting for civil process. The news of the "hold-up" with its attendant casualties went buzzing over the post at reveille, and barely had the story reached Atherton as he stood under the flag-staff, receiving the reports of the troop commanders, when out came the telegraph operator, racing, and the colonel read the hurriedly penned lines and turned to Ray. Somehow or other, whenever any swift, hard riding had to be done, Ray and Ray's troop were the first fellows thought of.

"Let your men finish breakfast," said the colonel, "then—do your best." And he handed the dark-eyed Kentuckian the despatch.

In an hour from that time, Mrs. Ray, holding her baby boy in her arms, was gazing from the north window of her army home at some black specks on the far horizon, and little Sandy, tugging at the skirts of her pretty morning wrapper, was coaxing for mother to hold him up too. The sorrel troop were up and away, heading for Wheelan Springs, on the Laramie trail, and bets were even between Stannard and Mainwaring that "Ray would nab the outfit before sundown."

But who could that "outfit" be? Jim Long said all were masked and he recognized none. Scut, his fireman, died without a sign. Parks, the expressman declared every form unfamiliar. Jarvis, the conductor, and Ryan, a brakeman, alone could furnish anything like a clue. Two of the desperadoes were dressed like two cowboys they had had aboard the night of the collision, a fortnight back, and the leader, who was tall, slender, well dressed, with the voice and intonation of a man of education and social position, closely resembled in build a passenger who boarded the sleeper that night at the Junction and left it after the accident and went to Pawnee. The division superintendent wired to Omaha such particulars as he could give. The legal representative and certain detectives of the road were ordered to leave for the scene by first train. The sheriff at Butte had a good-sized posse in readiness by breakfast-time, and then started valiantly on the trail of Ray's troop, passing through Fort Ransom about the time that Mr. Dana was mounting guard. Other sheriff's officials went out to Minden with the division superintendent, and others still pushed on to Pawnee, up on the broad plateau, to inquire for two cowboys, a tramp, and a swell, all of whom had appeared there in company, just after the smash-up at Alkali Flats, none of whom were there now, but one of whom, the tramp, so called, looking so entirely a different man—with trimmed hair and beard and good clothes—as to have been unrecognizable had he not rashly given himself away to everybody by bragging about his exploits the night of the smash-up,—that tramp had boarded No. 3 at three thirty A.M. at Pawnee, with a ticket for Sweetwater, but, so it transpired, had checked his trunk only as far as Butte. All this by rapid telegraphing to and fro was developed before the posse started on its way, but not until after the despoiled train had changed engines at Butte, and then, according to the inexorable rules of the railway, had gone on again. Jarvis remembered that a very decent, quiet fellow boarded the forward passenger coach at Pawnee with a ticket for Sweetwater, but he did not connect him with the tramp so lavishly provided for by the "swell" the night of the collision. But, now they spoke of it, they were about the same size and build, and what made it significant, that fellow seemed to have disappeared when the robbers jumped aboard and went through the passengers, nor did he appear again until just as the train pulled out for Butte, after the robbers were gone. Wiring west after the rushing train speedily brought this answer: "No party with ticket from Pawnee to Sweetwater aboard." And as he had been seen, and talked with, and listened to, up to the moment of the arrival of No. 3 at Butte, Jarvis declared

the man must be somewhere about the town at this moment, and Butte's few policemen were put in search.

All they discovered by noon was that such a party had been seen talking excitedly with a tall stranger in heavy overcoat and cap near the baggage-room just after the train came in. The baggage-man said that the man who presented check for the trunk from Pawnee was tall, slender, and dressed in rough, heavy coat and travelling-cap. The trunk was sole-leather. It had a lot of foreign stamps, hotel posters, and railway-luggage slips all over it, but the baggage-master had no time to examine it. Two men had carried the trunk away between them, declining the offers of the baggage-man. Somebody remembered such a trunk being wheeled in a barrow up Hoyt Street just after No. 3 came in, two men with it, a tall and a short, and that was all.

Recruit Hunter's pass was up at noon, and at eleven thirty he jumped from a light wagon at the south gate, and was hailed by the corporal of the guard as he was striding briskly towards his troop quarters:

"Say, young feller, come back here."

The tall recruit halted, turned and looked around, irresolute. It might be authoritative, it might be mere practical joke; at all events the corporal was responsible, and the soldier walked straight to where the non-commissioned officer was seated on a bench, near the hall door of the guard-house.

"Where you been?"

"To town on pass," was the calm answer.

"What did you hear about that hold-up?"

"Nothing of consequence."

"Well, your troop's gone thief-catching, and you're to report to Sergeant Merriweather as soon as you come in. Now you've come in, you haven't any cigars or drinkables about you, have you? This is the custom-house if you have."

Hunter looked neither annoyed nor disconcerted. Taking two or three cigars from his overcoat-pocket, he said, "Catch," tossed them carelessly to the vigilant wearer of the chevrons, hastened to barracks, deposited his bundles on the bed assigned him, and looked up and down the now silent and almost deserted building in search of some one to tell him what had taken place. Two men, one laid up from the kick of a horse, the other with an arm in a sling, came down to investigate the contents of his bundles, but were disarmed of hostile intent by his easy good nature and prompt offer of cigars. Whiskey he had none. Asking for Merriweather, he was told to look for him at his quarters.

"Catch him out of watching distance of the little woman," said one of them, with a grin. "Mind your eye, Hunter; she'll be making up to you next," said the other, "and we don't want you to be found with your head in the horse-pond, like Pat Shea;" and then it transpired that Trooper Shea had been a devoted admirer of pretty Mrs. Merriweather while she was still housemaid at the Freemans', and that Pat's devotions were equally divided between her and Muldoon's saloon until one winter's morning he was dragged by the legs from his icy winding-sheet with a dreadful gash in his throat and the neck of a

bottle still grasped in his frozen hand. Hunter obeyed his orders and went, and Mrs. Merriweather saw him coming, and ran to her glass before she answered the sharp knock at the door.

"Why, it's Mr. Hunter," she said. "Sure I knew the step before I saw you. Come in, Mr. Hunter. The sergeant's gone to the commissary, and I expect him back every minute."

But the trooper's blue eyes glanced only indifferently into the coquettish and smiling face.

"I was directed here," he said, "to report to Sergeant Merriweather, but I'll go on down to the stables and stop on my return. Thank you, no," he continued, with cold courtesy, as she again urged that he should enter, and strode away stablewards with more than one pair of eyes from the laundresses' quarters gazing after him,—those of Mrs. Merriweather being clouded and perplexed.

It had been a perfect morning, keen and frosty at guard-mount, but warmer as the sun wheeled high towards the zenith, and Atherton had had the regiment out for drill. The broad prairie northeast of the post was alive with prancing, high-mettled steeds, with dashing riders, and not a few carriages and Concord wagons, filled with ladies of the post, all rejoicing at having the regiment once more at home. For nearly two hours Atherton had had the seven troops in rapid movement here and there and everywhere over the plain, and now, the drill over, troop after troop came marching sedately and quietly homeward to cool and calm the horses before reaching stables. In full ranks, fifty men at least to each company, in their trim-fitting fatigue dress, and with the silken swallow-tail waving at the head of each little column, they looked wonderfully business-like and serviceable. The easy, practised seat of every man, the nonchalant grace of every pose, the resolute, dust-covered, sometimes devil-may-care faces, all seemed thoroughly in keeping with the scene and surroundings, thoroughly in accord with the buoyant action of the mettlesome mounts. Accustomed from boyhood to the best of horse-flesh, a born rider and judge, Trooper Hunter could not but see that though these frontier steeds might lack the dainty trappings and satin coats of the park and avenues of Gotham, there was life and spirit, fire and endurance, in almost every one in each of the seven columns. Standing by the northward gate, he keenly studied each troop as it came jogging briskly in. The colonel and the major, the adjutant and certain other officers, seemed to have grouped about the carriages of the ladies at the edge of the drill-ground, but at least one officer rode with every troop,—the best opportunity the new-comer yet had enjoyed of studying these future comrades with whom he might never expect to exchange a word or meet with more than the formal and punctilious touch of the hand to cap. They were moving at ease now until each troop in succession might cross the sentry-post and be called to attention in recognition of the salute of its solitary occupant. Hunter watched the man as he halted, faced outward as the nearest troop drew nigh, then snapped his carbine to the present as the head of the column turned to enter the gate, and Captain Gregg whipped out his sabre, gave voice over his shoulder to the prolonged "'Tensh-o-o-on" which brought every man's

head and eyes up and to the front, and then, looking square at the sentry, lowered the glittering blade in acknowledgment of the honor paid to himself and his command. Hunter's eyes kindled at the sight. No matter how humble the private soldier, there at least, on post as sentry, he could expect the recognition of the President himself, than whom in the eyes of the —th there lived no grander potentate on earth. Then, the next thing Hunter knew, the troop came tripping by the line of picket-fence on which he leaned, gazing out upon the spirited scene beyond; and now it was his turn. The teachings of the old days in the famous regiment, wherein every man might be said to have worn kid gloves when not on military duty, were fresh in his mind, as he had been well schooled in the first principles of soldier duty. Yet Hunter felt the blood was mounting to his temples and his heart was beating quicker as he faced the coming column, braced his heels together, and raised his hand to the cap visor, as Captain Gregg came ambling by. The big troop-leader glanced curiously at the lonely figure in the cheap fatigue dress, and again, but with far less precision, returned the salute, and Hunter could not but note the difference. Before another troop could pass him by, he moved quickly away, twenty yards or more beyond the gate, where he still could have good look at the returning soldiery, but was himself beyond saluting distance. One after another the seven separate compact little columns of fours marched steadily in, and jogged on down the gentle slope towards the huge wooden stables. He was still gazing in some odd fascination after the last, the roan troop, when the sound of bounding hoofs, whirring wheels, and gay laughter recalled his wandering thoughts, and, turning sharply to the prairie once more, his eyes fell upon the foremost of the rapidly nearing carriages.

It was a light, open phaeton, drawn by two spirited bays, whose fine action and well-made harness won his instant approval. Beside the carriage trotted the stocky, burly major whom he so well remembered the day of his first interview with Dana in the office. On the other side rode Dana himself, a handsome young soldier, and, far more interested in them than in the possible occupants of the vehicle, Hunter was looking upon them with a soldier's eye, keenly appreciative of Dana's graceful, easy seat and of Mainwaring's good, if bulky, horsemanship, when he suddenly became aware of the fact that instead of turning in at the gate the driver was heading straight southward, evidently intending to drive around to the main gate instead of passing, as Hunter had come, through that portion of the post best known as "Sudstown."

Another minute, and they must flash past him, not ten yards away, with only that low picket-fence between them. Already the sentry had halted and presented arms, both officers touching their caps in acknowledgment. Already the swift team was darting past the gate. The lady occupants of the stylish vehicle were whisking into view, and, yielding to sudden and uncontrollable impulse, Hunter whirled about, jumped the shallow ditch, and sprang behind the nearest of the little houses devoted to the use of the married soldiers. In that one swift glance at the fair occupants he had seen a face at sight of which the

blood went rushing to his own. There, side by side, were Mrs. Mainwaring and the young lady whom he had picked up in his arms the night of that "head-on" collision at Alkali Flats.

CHAPTER VII.

MAJOR STANNARD had won his bet, and Mainwaring was more than usually "grumpy" in consequence. Ray and his men, riding like the wind, had run down the train-robbers before they reached the Dry Fork, and in a long, stern chase had overhauled first one man, then another, until darkness set in and hid the leading fugitives from sight. Seven lively specimens of the border ruffian were the captives of the sorrel troop by nightfall, and, closely guarded, these were the men turned over next morning to Mr. Sheriff Conway when that much fatigued official and his posse reached the spot where Ray and his men had made camp the night before. Ray himself, with a dozen troopers, had pushed on at daybreak, following the trail of the fugitives in hopes of capturing the more prominent members of the party, who, as it turned out, had most of the ill-gotten booty, while his lieutenant, Mr. Scott, remained in charge of the main body and of the prisoners until the arrival of the civil authorities, who promptly demanded and obtained possession. Conway and his posse, rejoicing, turned homeward at once with their dishevelled prizes, hoping to reach Butte and receive a triumph by evening of the next day. Seven train-robbers was more than had ever been caught before in the history of the Territory, and great would be the rejoicings. Securely bound, the luckless captives, each man lashed to the stirrup of some one of the numerous posse, trudged painfully along the homeward trail. Silent, resolute, almost defiant, no one of their number would give the whisper of a hint as to the identity of the leaders or of one another. All were strangers to Butte. Neither Conway nor his deputies had ever seen one of their faces before. Lieutenant Scott had lost no time in saddling and pushing on after his captain, two of the posse riding with him so as to give the possibly necessary civil sanction to the arrest of the robbers and to take the customary civil credit for the same, naïvely explaining, "You fellows in the regular army don't need it: we do, or there's no chance for Conway's crowd next election."

And on his triumphant homeward way, what was more natural than that Conway should march through Ransom the following evening just as the ghost-like column in white stable-frocks came swinging up to barracks through the gloaming? As the shortest road ran close to the men's quarters, it happened that the burly sheriff, with his captive train, went clattering by the long wooden porches, and such troopers as happened to be excused from stables—precious few in Atherton's regiment—came rushing out of quarters to see them. All the companies had had to "stand to heel" and have their stalls inspected before they started up the slope, but in Ray's stable were only a few horses, and the few men under charge of Sergeant Merriweather had

already gone to barracks, and were there when Conway came through, and of this few was the new trooper, Hunter.

Still wearing his white stable-frock, and looking a trifle tired and sombre, the recruit had stopped at the corner of the porch and was gazing with but languid interest at Conway's motley cavalcade, when Merriweather joined him. "A precious lot of jail-birds," said the sergeant, as the party came jogging by, sheriff and deputies grinning affably, and many of the latter shouting words of condolence to the stay-at-homes who hadn't been partakers with them in the glories of the chase and capture. Four prisoners had trudged wearily by, while Trooper Hunter replied briefly but without especial civility to the sergeant's remark. Then came the fifth, whose eyes, haggard and hunted-looking, glanced up just one second at the man in stable-frock at the edge of the porch, and instantly there was a flash of recognition. Sergeant Merriweather, turning to his companion in surprise, saw him gazing after number five with an expression of amazement and dismay upon his handsome face.

"Then you've met one of these fellows before, have you?" said Merriweather, with instant suspicion.

But Hunter answered never a word, and, turning short, plunged into the shadows of the great, gloomy barrack.

Not for forty-eight hours longer did Captain Ray return, and with him came the two deputies and one more prisoner. The others, so said the hoof-tracks, had scattered during that first night over the face of the earth, and even the trail soon became indistinct on the hard prairie beyond the Ska; but enough was known to warrant the statement that two of the number had gone towards the agencies away to the north-east, and that their mounts were evidently blooded stock, far swifter than Ray's, for never once had their leaders been in view, and there was no use in further pursuit. Huddled in the county jail, the eight malefactors were awaiting the action of the civil authorities and their identification by the railway people while Ray and his returned men shook off the dust of travel and settled down to garrison duty again. The first thing demanded of Sergeant Merriweather was an account of his stewardship and the progress of the new trooper, and Merriweather looked solemn and mysterious, and was finally understood to say that he had nothing to complain of in him, but he "reckoned other people might." Whereupon Ray bade him speak out. The Kentuckian could not tolerate insinuation or innuendo in a soldier. And Merriweather told the story of the mutual recognition of Hunter and the unknown captive.

It was the evening of his return to Ransom, and just before tattoo, which in those days was always accompanied by a roll-call.

"See if Hunter is in quarters," said the captain, "and send him to me." And Merriweather hastened on his errand.

No. The men in barracks said the swell recruit was out somewhere. "Mabbe he's gone down to pay his respects to Mrs. Merriweather, sergeant," sneered an ill-conditioned fellow, a man no other liked, yet who had served with the old troop over half a dozen years. Merriweather knew it would never do to notice the remark, but it

stung him all the same. "Find him, you, and tell him the captain wants him at once," said he to the would-be sneerer, then slammed the door behind him and sprang out into the night. He had not been home for nearly an hour, and he needed, he told himself, a drink: so thither he went.

Bright lights were burning in some of the quarters, dim ones in others, but in his own the light seemed lowered to the verge of darkness. Not two yards from his door the tall figure of a man in soldier overcoat loomed into view, and, peering closely at him, Merriweather discovered the recruit.

"Where you been, Hunter?" was the sharp, stern demand.

"Looking for you, sergeant," was the quiet reply.

"Who sent you?" And there were both anger and suspicion in the tone.

"Oh, no one. I wished to speak with you a moment. I want some advice."

"There is no need of your coming here, then. You've seen me a dozen times in the last two days: why didn't you ask it then?"

For a moment the younger man was silent; surprise and disappointment clouded his face. So, too, there crept into it a shade of indignation, and it showed plainly in the tone of his reply.

"I had no need of it then," was the answer, as the younger soldier looked squarely into the eyes of the senior. Then, just as when angered by the overbearing ways of Major Mainwaring, Hunter's high spirit overmastered his resolution to take men and matters as he found them, and his eyes, too, flashed angrily. "Whatever thought I had of it ten minutes ago," he said, "is gone now. I won't trouble you."

And with that he would have gone his way, but Merriweather, smarting with jealousy and suspicion, threw himself across his path.

"You go no further, young man, till you hear what I've got to say. This is the third time in less than a week you've been prowling here around my door. Keep your distance in future. D'ye understand? No man enters that house except on my invitation. Now you go to Captain Ray and tell him I sent you."

For a moment the tall young soldier stood there, too astonished to make reply. He had heard the men talk of Merriweather as "tough on recruits." He had understood that new men must take a great deal of bullying from the elders,—that it was purposely done to try their temper and test their sense of subordination. Hitherto he had looked upon Merriweather's asperities as having no personal significance. Now, for the first time, it flashed upon him that he was singled out for harsh, overbearing, and abusive language from a man coarse by nature, mentally, physically, and socially his inferior. All on a sudden the hot blood boiled in his veins, and, forgetful of his new obligations, reckless of anything but his wrath, Trooper Hunter hit out straight, hard, and well, taking Merriweather squarely between the eyes and knocking him flat. The resounding thwack of the blow, the heavy crash of the fall, were echoed from the door-way by a woman's startled cry, and the next thing Hunter knew as he stood there still quivering, his fist clinched and ready to dash again at his floored victim, now feebly

struggling to his knees, the slender form of the sergeant's wife was bending over the beaten man; then she threw herself upon her knees beside her prostrate husband.

"You've struck him cruel hard," she moaned. "Oh, you shouldn't have minded what he said, Mr. Hunter. He's awful jealous.—There, Danny, sit still,—sit still," she pleaded, soothingly. "Run for a little water, Mr. Hunter; he's bleeding fearful. Do be still, Danny. Sure the gentleman never set foot inside your door, nor spoke a word to me. You're foolish, Danny." She strove to stanch the blood with her handkerchief, but he was slowly regaining his faculties, and thrust her rudely away, and then she saw he was fumbling inside the breast of his coat, and fear gave her strength. Hunter had taken a dipperful of water from the barrel at the side of the little hut, and was bringing it, dripping, wondering as he came what would be the outcome of this mad impulse, but she met him half-way, seized the dipper, and bade him go. "Quick," she panted; "don't stop an instant now. Get away before he comes to himself, or he'll shoot. Go instantly, please, Mr. Hunter, or maybe he'll kill me too."

"I can't go if I've hurt him. I must help him up," he began, but she clutched his arm with trembling hands and whirled him about towards the barracks.

"No, no; leave everything to me. Don't come here till I tell you. Don't you speak of this to a soul, unless you want him to kill me. He'll never harm me now unless he sees you still here; but not a word of it. I can keep him quiet." Then she pushed him violently from her, just as the sergeant, staggering to his feet, held forth a feeble hand as though seeking support.

And at that moment, up along the line of barracks, the trumpets began the spirited music of the tattoo. The doors of neighboring cottages began to open, and soldier forms, enveloped in the long caped overcoats, hastened forth. Irresolute, bewildered, hardly knowing what he did and far from knowing what he ought to do, Trooper Hunter hurried from the spot, breasted the slope to the "bench" on which was spread the garrison proper, and found full two-thirds of his troop already gathering in front of their quarters awaiting the signal to form ranks,—the quick, stirring assembly.

"Did you see Doyle? He was looking for you, Hunter," chirruped a little Patlander. "You're blowing, man. Where ye running from?"

But Hunter made no reply. Hooking the collar of his overcoat and buttoning it throughout, he stepped quietly to the point where the centre of his troop usually formed for roll-call, for his place in ranks was close behind a tall corporal who marked the left of the first platoon. The first sergeant, silent and solitary, his swinging lantern in his hand, stood a few yards away, gazing out across the dim parade at the bright lights in the distant quarters of the officers. The soldierly form of the second lieutenant could be dimly discerned a few yards beyond the sergeant. To the right and left, in front of the other barrack buildings, big black groups of men were gathered and sergeants' lights were gleaming, all awaiting the next signal. Suddenly it came, quick,

rippling, merry. "Fall in," were the hoarse words growled from half a dozen soldier throats. The groups quickly resolved themselves into two long columns of files that faced to their left the instant the music ceased, and stood motionless while, with the ease and rapidity of daily practice, the sergeant called the roll.

The non-commissioned head of the sorrel troop twice repeated one name in a questioning, surprised tone, then faced his lieutenant and reported, "Sergeant Merriweather absent, sir." The officer acknowledged the salute, said, "Dismiss the troop," and, facing about, found himself confronting the unexpected apparition of Captain Ray, and heard in the soft dialect of the Blue Grass his captain's words:

"Send Trooper Hunter to me, sergeant, directly you dismiss."

And while Lieutenant Scott went away to report the result of roll-call to the adjutant, and the sergeant again faced his company, Hunter felt his heart sink within him. Already Merriweather, then, had managed to get word to his captain, and the captain was there to wreak vengeance on him, the luckless offender. In violation of the strictest articles of war, he, Hunter Gray, had struck down his superior officer, and was now to suffer the penalty of the law.

"You hear, Hunter: the captain wants you." Then, "Break ranks. March!" was the order, and the troop, cohesive and compact but the moment before, dissolved at the word and fell to pieces, leaving the new member standing all alone. For one moment he remained there to pull himself together, then, nerved to face the worst, strode out to meet his fate, his heart thumping in his breast.

"Hunter," said the captain, "did I not understand you to say that you were a total stranger west of the Missouri, and that you had neither friends nor enemies out here?"

"Yes, sir," was the trooper's reply, his hand still at the cap visor.

"Then how did you come to know that prisoner in the lot brought in by the sheriff?"

Hunter was silent.

"You admit having seen him before?"

"I do, sir."

"Where and when?"

"Before I joined the regiment, sir. I met him with another man at Pawnee."

Captain Ray was silent a moment. He stood scrutinizing in deep concern the pale, clear-cut face before him.

"When I vouched for you in the adjutant's office the day of your enlistment, I felt somehow that you were a truthful man and not a runagate, and I don't wish to be disappointed in you. I don't want to find a man with a clouded record in my troop. What do you know about that robbery?"

"Nothing more than everybody else, sir,—that it took place, and that——" but here again he hesitated.

"Well, that what, Hunter?" said Captain Ray, noting the soldier's significant pause.

"Nothing more, sir. I met one of the prisoners at Pawnee in a

restaurant some few weeks ago. I never saw him before, and I've never seen him since—except that day."

Ray stood calmly studying his man. "I told you it was taking chances to enlist an applicant who looked as though he might have been a man of high social standing," said he, presently, "and you looked me in the eye and said I shouldn't regret taking you in my troop. You've been with me barely a week, and already you are the object of suspicion. How long will it be before I hear you directly accused of something to make me deeply regret my over-confidence?"

Hunter started as though to speak, but the words died on his lips. From the direction of the barracks a soldierly step was swiftly approaching. The turf beneath their feet began to light up with the gleam of a nearing lantern. It was the first sergeant again, and Hunter heard him abruptly halt, true to the formal etiquette of the old cavalry days, and await his captain's signal to approach.

"Remain here a moment," said Ray to his anxious recruit.—"What is it, sergeant?"

"I found Sergeant Merriweather, who was absent from roll-call, at his quarters, sir."

Ray frowned. Another instance of Merriweather's falling off since his marriage.

"What excuse had he for his absence?" was the brief question.

"Well, sir, his wife says that he had met with a mishap,—had a fall in the dark. But it looked to me more like a blow, and he couldn't deny it, sir."

"A blow? Assaulted? When, and by whom?"

"Just a few minutes ago, sir. Close to his own door, I think."

Ray's head went back with a jerk, an odd old trick of his when mentally aroused. "He must know who did it, unless he was struck from behind. Did you ask him?"

"Certainly, sir, and he declares he didn't see, and Mrs. Merriweather declares it was two men, and they ran away towards barracks the moment they downed him."

For a few seconds the sergeant stood looking at his captain's perplexed face. Then the recruit suddenly and impulsively stepped forward. Before he could speak, Captain Ray threw up his hand in warning gesture, as though commanding silence. The first sergeant whirled abruptly and stood facing towards the distant south gate. Borne on the night wind came a confused medley of hoarse murmurs, of distant shouts, of rapid-running feet; then, from far out across the townward stretch of prairie, the muffled report of fire-arms, one, two, three; and from the direction of the guard-house a soldier came rushing like a Wyoming gale.

"What is it, Kid?" sang out the sergeant to the sprinter.

"Sheriff Conway—stabbed, and his prisoners loose. They want the doctor."

"Why," said Ray, in surprise, "what business could he have out here? What does it mean?"

"They were telling me just before tattoo, captain, that Conway came out with a warrant for some one here at the fort, but asked to see

Prisoner Healy, one of the two that escaped the night of the train-robbery,—the one of the two that was recaptured. The man must have knifed him and got away."

"Is Captain Ray there?" came a call from the darkness, in the deep, well-known voice of the colonel, and Ray sprang to answer. Then the sergeant turned on Trooper Hunter.

"Look here, young feller," said he. "They tell me you're the chap Conway wanted."

CHAPTER VIII.

A GENERAL court-martial had convened at Ransom for the trial of such enlisted men as should be brought before it, and the president thereof looked out from behind his newspaper during a lull in the proceedings, and, with the characteristic expression which seemed to say, "Don't you dare lie to me now," popped the following question:

"Blake, what's the name of the Three Guardsmen?"

And Blake, never laying down his paper or changing a muscle of his long, sallow countenance, placidly and promptly responded, "Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos."

Captain Gregg, sitting at the right of the presiding officer, after reflecting profoundly a moment, slowly nodded, as though to say, "Right, though I didn't think you knew." Captain Truscott, sitting opposite Gregg and busily occupied with a letter, glanced quickly from under his heavy lashes and compressed his lips. Some of the youngsters farther down the long table looked a bit mystified; but Blake's balance-wheel, Captain Ray, was not a member of the court, and probably would have accepted the reply as authoritative had he been there, for Ray was no reader. It was the questioner who looked dissatisfied, and the questioner, as usual, was Mainwaring.

For a moment he pondered, scowling at Blake the while, then outspoke:

"Well, that's all right, probably; but what I want to get at is the name of that other fellow with 'em—Dee—something—how do you pronounce it?"

"Depends on whether you're in a salon or a saloon, major," answered Blake. "Dartanyan in one case and Dee Art*ag*nan in t'other. What have you stumbled on now?"

"Nothing much. Reading about a fellow that named his horse that and thinks he's going to sweep the race-tracks from Jerome Park to Jerusalem. Dee—what d' you call him? I wouldn't ride one of their steeple-chases on an English saddle if you'd give me a thousand dollars."

"I wouldn't care to ride one on any other kind; certainly not on one of our service saddles," said Blake, whose long legs could wrap around any horse in the regiment. "Those high, sharp pommels are the worst kind of thing to use 'cross country."

"Not if you know how to ride," said the major, who loyally stood

by everything that was regulation. "I'll bet you any real cavalryman will tell you that he'd rather use a McClellan for any kind of riding than any other kind of saddle."

"Done!" said Blake, "and leave it to Stannard or Ray." And here he kicked across under the table to rouse his opposite fellow-member to full rejoicing in the colloquy, for Mainwaring couldn't bear to hear Stannard quoted as authority on any subject, and was sure that Ray was a vastly overrated officer.

"What does Stannard know about it, anyhow?" bristled Mainwaring: "he never rode anything but a McClellan. And as for Ray, I know a dozen better riders and cavalrymen who agree with me."

"All right. You come out to the hurdles after court adjourns, major, and we'll give you a chance to see the difference. That pretty mare of Mrs. Ray's is to have a jumping-lesson this afternoon, and you can try both saddles and systems, if you like."

But the re-entrance of the judge-advocate with the prisoner put a stop to the chat, and Mainwaring called the court to order.

A week had rolled by since the night of the assault on Sergeant Merriweather and the stabbing of Sheriff Conway. The first episode seemed to have died out of the interest of even the few who knew of it, for Merriweather's lips were sealed, but the second was still the topic of excited talk.

And well it might be. Armed with a warrant, so he claimed, for the arrest of certain soldiers of the garrison, Conway had come to the post about tattoo that evening, had stopped at the guard-house and asked to see Prisoner Healy, a soldier under charges of assault and robbery of a fellow-trooper only a few weeks before. Healy and a companion confined as an accomplice had sawed their way out and escaped, as has been told, but the former was recaptured and brought back. He was a merry little Irishman, an almost universal favorite before the trouble occurred. The garrison declared to a man he couldn't have had a hand in the robbery, though it was probable he couldn't have kept out of the assault. But evidence of a serious character was piled up against him when he made the suspicious attempt to get away. Conway was possessed with the idea that Healy knew something about the train-robbery. No one could surely identify any of the seven languishing in Butte's stronghold, and the sheriff was at his wits' end. The officer of the guard had gone over to get his heavy coat and to change into rough rig for the night when Conway appeared, and an over-confident sergeant, detailing a sentry to stand close by, permitted Healy to come out of the prison-room and be questioned. At first the young Irishman was stubborn and would tell nothing, but gradually he made admissions and kept glancing fearfully over his shoulder as though he thought the sentry might hear. So Conway drew him around behind the portico of the heavy log structure, and told the sentry to come no nearer: he would be responsible. The very next minute the sentry heard a stifled cry, a scuffle. Healy darted away like a shot into the darkness. The sentry and the guard pursued in vain, and Conway lay stabbed to the hilt of a ghastly-looking knife. He had bled almost

to death before the surgeon reached him or unskilled hands could check the flow. Now he was lying at the post hospital, slowly convalescing, but very weak and dazed.

The question was, what had become of Healy? Where was he in hiding? for no man answering his description had boarded the Transcontinental trains far or near. Butte was a big, straggling frontier town, illimitable in its future possibilities, said the "promoters," and equally illimitable in present devices for concealing stolen property or stealing practitioners. Butte had a large floating population and small sinking fund, the latter devoted to rewards for capture of malefactors, and Conway had a wide-spread reputation for sleepless vigilance and luckless ventures. He made many arrests, and nearly as many errors in the eyes of the law, since convictions were few and far between. He had gloried in his seven desperadoes just about forty-eight hours. Then, as man after man looked them over and said he couldn't testify against them, as they proved to be perfect strangers, Conway's face grew lined and anxious. It began to look as though failure were again about to stamp him, when some one suggested that Pat Healy at the post could tell him all he wanted to know, and somebody else whispered that the sooner he got every man even remotely connected with the robbery the better would it be for his chance of re-election. Then he came to Ransom trebly armed, but his very first victim proved far too clever, adroit, and dangerous. The knife was driven furiously, and it was God's mercy the sheriff was not killed outright.

And then Miss Leroy, the Mainwarings' guest, had developed an odd fad for an Eastern girl. A more independent young woman had never been seen at Ransom. She was always unlike other girls, said Mrs. Mainwaring. She had always visited the poor and needy at home, had headed all manner of charitable schemes as a young girl, and had a mania for reading aloud to the sick. Few of the ladies of the —th, deeply imbued though some of them were with religious faith, had ever thought it their duty to visit the patients in the big post hospital. The surgeon and the steward did all that. The young assistant surgeon was a bachelor and susceptible. Miss Leroy's plea to be allowed to visit the hospital was eagerly granted, and he himself was there to escort her. One of the first patients to interest her was Sheriff Conway, to whom she was now reading aloud an hour every morning. Mild raillery had no effect upon her. Expostulation was not resorted to, for it speedily developed that, with all her slender, dainty physique, Miss Leroy had a vigorous, if placid, will of her own. The post surgeon had said there was no harm whatever, in fact it was a blessing to more patients than one, therefore by all means let Miss Leroy keep it up. Thereafter there was no one to say her nay. Secretly Mrs. Mainwaring had hoped the colonel and her husband would express disapproval, but, with the perversity of their sex, they persisted in saying to Miss Leroy that she was an angel of goodness, and it was a wonder that other women had not done likewise long before. By the time she had been three weeks at Ransom Kate Leroy was better known and infinitely better loved in the quarters of the married soldiers whose little ones were ailing, and in the wards of the big hospital, than all

but two or three of the ladies of the regiment. It was a new departure at the post.

Day after day, then, was she to be seen, each morning about ten o'clock, on her way to her patients, and with them she would stay until orderly call sounded at noon. There were four men in hospital when she began; there were seven men at the end of the week, and the doctor said she was making it too attractive a place after all.

"Next thing," said Wilkins, "she'll be after beatifying the gyard-house."

Mrs. Mainwaring found that telling her niece what people said about this fad of hers had no effect whatever. So she went a bit further, and told her things people really had not said, but might say: this, too, fell harmless. Afternoons and evenings Miss Leroy was ready to devote to social duties and Mrs. Mainwaring, but the morning readings to the men in the convalescent ward went on without interruption or noteworthy incident an entire week; then came a change in the arrangement.

True to his colors, Mainwaring was out at the hurdles ten minutes before anybody else that afternoon, and loudly calling for Blake to come and make good his word. He came soon enough, Mrs. Ray and Mrs. Blake, two charming women, with him. Presently out rode Captain Billy on his old favorite "Dandy," now a sedate steed over ten years of age; after him strode his Irish groom Hogan, leading a beautiful little bay mare, all points and elasticity, a spirited, dancing creature, with dainty head and legs, brilliant eyes, pretty pointed ears, and a satin coat that fairly glistened. The hurdles were at the edge of the drill-ground on the northeast side of the post, and no sooner was the party sighted from the barracks than a number of troopers made their way to the fence, and, with appreciative eyes, stood watching at respectful distance the preparation for Stella's first lesson with side-saddle and skirt.

Among the men was Sergeant Merriweather, still discolored as to his face, but an interested spectator for all that. Mainwaring, Ray, and Blake were in riding dress, Mainwaring and Ray in saddle, and Mainwaring's first bellow was, "Now, where's your English saddle?"

"Coming," said Blake, coolly, and pointed towards the stables, whence, at easy gait, a tall, slender soldier came riding a troop horse, carrying something over his arm. Blake recognized at once Ray's recent acquisition, Hunter. Mainwaring stopped glaring at Blake, turned and gazed at the new-comer with all his eyes, and then whirled in saddle towards Ray and ejaculated, "Well, I'll be damned!" There were times when even the presence of ladies couldn't restrain Mainwaring's impulse to verbal outbreaks.

"Thought you had a whole troop of rough riders, Ray," said he, after again glowering at the new-comer until he grew tired of the calm indifference which rewarded his gaze. "This ain't one of your lot, is it? I've seen him before."

"Yes, the day you persuaded him not to enlist," laughed Ray, good-naturedly. "I roped him in afterwards." Then, lowering his voice, "He's got a hand on a horse's mouth as light as a child's."

The tall recruit had dismounted from his own troop-horse, and, having thrown the reins over a picket of the fence, was now quietly approaching Stella, with a light English saddle in his hand. Hogan, dismounted, was petting her glossy neck and speaking soothingly, but the pretty creature, with ears erect, was switching about, apparently hunting for something at which to shy, and the ladies' furs gave her ready excuse. The moment Mrs. Ray stepped forward to pat her, Stella backed vigorously, dragging Hogan with her, and, despite Ray's practised hand extended to aid, back she persisted in going until she bumped into the hurdle-post. This furnished excuse for a kick and a plunge. Ray sprang from his saddle, and, telling Hogan to look after Dandy, himself took Stella's bit and began Blue Grass expostulation, which seemed more intelligible than Irish. At all events, the mettlesome creature quieted down long enough to admit of Hunter's approach, and that tall, silent young soldier quickly set and girthed the saddle, and then, at a nod from his captain, vaulted on her back, Ray letting go the moment the reins were gathered.

And then did Stella dance nimbly, daintily about, playful and spirited, but not in the least vicious, Hunter giving her head abundant room to toss, and maintaining only light and easy pressure on the bit. Mainwaring sniffed disdainfully at the uncavalrylike pose, the long, flat seat, the knees far to the front, the feet set home in the stirrups and away forward. He sniffed still more when Stella began to bound and curvet, and Hunter rose slightly in his stirrups, riding lightly, springingly, and never thinking of sitting fast. Ray called to Merriweather to bring one or two men and come over to the hurdles, and, without an audible word, the order was obeyed, though it was remarked at the time that the sergeant hesitated a bit, possibly because of his disfigured face.

"Try her over the bar first, Ray," said Mainwaring. And, with a man stationed at each post and the bar set easily nearly three feet from the ground, Hunter guided his pretty mount to the spot, let her sniff at and examine the strange affair, then as quietly rode her a dozen yards away, turned her head to the bar, and, relaxing the reins, gave her the hint to go, his long sinewy legs close pressed to the saddle. Stella came at it delightedly, but changed her mind with the second stride, and would have flown the track but for the firm hand and closed leg. Finding she couldn't dodge and had to do it, she rose high, and, half affrighted, cleared the bar and came bounding lightly to the turf, then bolted away with blood in her eye and the bit in her teeth. Only a few rods, however. Hunter, sitting her like wax now, reined her round in broad circle, headed her back for the group, gradually checking her speed as he neared the party.

"Try it from that side," said Ray, and over she popped, light as a bird. A third and a fourth time was the leap repeated, Stella enjoying being the centre of attraction and improving on her efforts. Then came the attempt at the wider hurdle, a man being stationed at each end to give her the idea of posts between which she must jump: this, too, proved a bagatelle. And all this time Hunter had never opened his lips to speak. Now, in obedience to the captain's signal, the trooper reined up close to him.

"What do you think of her jumping?" asked Ray.

"She has been well taught, sir," was the answer, in low, quiet tone. "I think she will give Mrs. Ray little trouble; but she has never been ridden with the side-saddle and skirt, I understand."

No, she had not. Hogan produced the side-saddle and a cavalry blanket. In two minutes the mare was housed in the one and Hunter rolled, as to his legs, in the other. This time mounting was not so easy. Stella despised that blanket and would not suffer it to come near her, and that blanket was to be tried in lieu of a riding-skirt. Mainwaring sat on his horse, shouting all manner of suggestions, sorely trying Ray's sense of subordination. At last, impatiently, he hazarded the remark, "Phoo, Ray! that man can't ride. There's a dozen men in my old troop would have had her over the hurdle, blanket and all, by this time."

The blood rushed to Hunter's face, and he bit his lip hard. Thus far Ray had been holding the mare's head by the bit,—a hub, so to speak, about which she circled, first one way, then the other, to dodge the blanket-swathed form. Now the trooper was heard to speak.

"Pardon me, captain, but may I take her myself?"

Instantly the two ladies exchanged a glance. "I told you he looked like a gentleman," said Mrs. Ray, in low tone.

Then began a very pretty piece of coaxing. With one firm hand at the bit, the blanket still strapped about his waist, Trooper Hunter had managed to reach Stella's neck with his right hand, and, patting her softly, was murmuring gently. "Makin' love to her in Irish," Hogan muttered to Duffy. Several additions had been made to the group by this time. The colonel, Dana by his side and followed by his orderly, came riding around from the direction of the stables, and, doffing his cap to the ladies, sat in saddle an interested spectator. Several wives and children of the soldiers had been attracted from their quarters to the fence, while a little farther back, aloof from the general run of Sudstown people, with a pale-blue shawl, one of Mrs. Freeman's discarded evening wraps, over her head, pretty Mrs. Merriweather stood at gaze. Hunter slowly lifted an edge of the blanket and let Stella nose it, which she did, feigned to be much frightened, and attempted again to pull away. But at last, wearying of fruitless efforts, she consented to smell of it, and then nudged it disdainfully aside. The next thing she knew, Hunter had slipped both hands back, one to the pommel, the other to her mane, and with agile spring alighted on the saddle, threw the right leg over the horn, and, despite her plunging, Stella found herself once more under his weight, firmly held as ever. Five minutes' petting made her forget her burden, even when shown the shadow of the skirt. In less than ten she had leaped the hurdle to and fro half a dozen times, and was realizing she had made a fool of herself. And then some unhallowed inspiration seized the major.

"What I want is to see how she'll behave under a cavalry saddle. —You've ridden one often enough, I suppose?" he said, scowling at Hunter.

"Never until I came here, sir."

"Mean to tell me you've never been in the cavalry?"

"I told the major as much a fortnight ago," was the firm yet respectful reply.

"Well, where'd you learn to ride, then?" asked Mainwaring, who had a fixed idea that no one not of the cavalry could be at home in the saddle; this, too, despite long years among vaqueros, Comanches, and cowboys.

"I learned to ride as a boy, sir."

"Well, dismount and put on that McClellan saddle," said Mainwaring, curtly.

Atherton heard the order, saw the quick glance of the soldier towards his captain, and the half-vexed expression in Ray's face, and, glancing at Mrs. Ray, hesitated no longer.

"No, no, major, don't change the saddle. Let us see how she'll take the bar again. Set it loosely, you men, so that it will slide off the pegs if she strikes."

Sergeant Merriweather was busily setting the peg at three feet again, when, glancing up to see that the opposite end was at the same notch, he caught sight of the slender figure of his wife standing well back of the group at the fence, her eyes fixed, not on him or on the ladies, but, with deep, intense interest in her gaze, upon the tall, erect young soldier on the spirited mare. Up to this moment Merriweather had been silently carrying out his instructions, all his attention given to them or to Stella. Of the man in saddle he took apparently no notice whatever. Now, forgetting everything else in hand, he stood there, half bent over, gazing, with heaven only knows what thoughts surging through his brain, straight and steadfast at his unconscious wife.

"Sergeant, don't you hear?" At last the impatient words seemed to reach him, and the flustered face of his comrade at the opposite post recalled him to himself. "The captain says set it at three feet six. Quick! She's coming."

Coming she was, with a rush, Hunter's hands held low on her withers, his legs dangling on the near side as she bounded over the springy turf. Merriweather jerked out the iron peg and thrust it into the three-six hole, lifting the bar as he did so, but turning the hook of the pin upward instead of down. It was no leap at all. There was no reason why she should strike, no reason why, if she did strike, any harm would occur. But it was all done in a second of time. Sitting sideways, instead of astride, Hunter was at a disadvantage. He could not "lift her" as he was accustomed. The excited creature dashed at the bar as though reckless of its added height; the off forefoot struck the tough, unyielding wood, tripped her, threw her headlong on the turf, hurling Hunter, blanket, and herself in a confused and rolling heap. A woman's shriek went up at the instant, but it came not from the lips of the women on the field.

It seemed but another instant before Hunter was on his feet, reins in hand, while Stella was struggling to rise. Forgetful of himself, he sought to see if the mare were harmed. Ray and Hogan sprang to his side. "Are you hurt, man?" they eagerly asked, but he laughed it off.

"Not at all, sir. I'm only troubled about her."

Panting, wide-eyed, and startled, Stella stood, with heaving flanks, wondering what it all meant. Ray hastened to reassure his wife. Atherton rode up to satisfy himself the soldier was uninjured. Over beyond the roadway and fence two of the laundresses were leading Mrs. Merriweather, shocked and actually weeping, away. At them the sergeant stood gazing fixedly, his discolored face working with passion, and Captain Blake had twice to bid him pick up the bar before he answered and obeyed.

"That's what you call a stand-off, I suppose," muttered the man at the opposite post, as Merriweather brushed him by. "Don't tell me I don't know who floored you." But the sergeant never heard. He was hastening after his wife.

"Ray," said the colonel as they were riding into the garrison a few minutes later, "that was a piece of gross carelessness on the part of your sergeant. That man has been getting less reliable every month for the last two years. You'd better think twice should he apply for re-enlistment."

"Gerald," said clear-sighted Mrs. Blake, as she clung to the arm of the captain, after leaving Mrs. Ray at her gate, "I'm glad that didn't happen in your troop. Are you sure Sergeant Merriweather set that pin properly? Wasn't it his wife that shrieked?"

"Pet," said Mrs. Mainwaring to her niece, just as the young doctor lifted his cap and looked for an invitation to enter, as he met the two ladies returning from a call at the Rays' an hour later, "you and Dr. Jayne came near getting another patient this afternoon, and a most interesting one, they say, a mysterious swell in the Sorrels. He might serve to make you forget the handsome unknown who played doctor for you the night of the collision.—She hasn't told you about that, I suppose, has she, doctor?"

"'M—ah, no, no indeed," said Dr. Jayne, in evident dismay. "What was he like, pray?"

"Oh, divinely tall and most divinely fair," said Mrs. Mainwaring, laughing. "Kate has his flask and handkerchief yet, waiting for him to return and claim them—and her."

And that evening Miss Leroy wondered whether aunts were always so disagreeable, or whether this was merely her own fault, and entirely her fault, because she had admitted that, though there were agreeable men in the regiment, they were all married.

CHAPTER IX.

Conway, convalescing, had been bundled back to town, leaving blessings on the head of his fair nurse and reader. Corporal Shannon, kicked by a mule in the quartermaster's corral, was installed in his place. The daily reading was going on in the hospital, despite social duties that grew more exacting as Miss Leroy became better known and more appreciated. Over in the sorrel troop's quarters Hunter,

despite inflexible reserve as to his past, had won the good will of most of the men. Quin, a garrison bully, pitching upon a smaller comrade for a fancied affront, had been himself pitched into a snow-drift, and when he rushed at his antagonist was floored flat by as neat a swing on the jaw as ever the —th had heard of. It was a new blow, in fact, to the regiment, and the story went from barrack to barrack that the Sorrels had got a swell boxer as well as rider. Curiosity as to Hunter's antecedents burst all bounds. Major Mainwaring's assertion that he had seen the fellow somewhere before and knew he must be a deserter was sufficient to make the recruit an object of interest in garrison society, even if he had not won distinction as trainer of Mrs. Ray's beautiful mare, whose delicate mouth and Eastern schooling made her somewhat too sensitive for ordinary cavalry handling. Ray, once the light rider of the regiment, could have coached her beautifully, but Ray was growing bulky with years, and an old bullet-wound in the thigh, received during a Sioux campaign years before, was troubling him as winter wore on. What no one understood was how Ray came to select Hunter, for Ray declared he had no previous knowledge of him whatever, which was true. Truscott, when appealed to for his opinion, smiled gravely, as was his wont, and said Ray had as unerring an eye for a horseman as he had for a horse. But it was in "Suds-town," where dwelt the wives and daughters of the soldiery, that Trooper Hunter's goings and comings, doings and sayings, were becoming matters of such absorbing interest. He was credited with being fabulously wealthy, among other things, for he certainly had money at his command. He also had friends and acquaintances—some said a wife and family, or at least a lady-love—somewhere in town, for he had twice asked for passes, and more than once was believed to have gone thither without that formality. Mrs. Merriweather, who held her head so high above the other women, was accused of "setting her cap" for the stranger, and she laid herself open to calumny by declaring to one or two envious dames that Mr. Hunter was a frequent caller, only "Dan" didn't like it and had warned him off. "Indeed, he got to coming too often for his own good," said she, which meant worlds of helpless regret on her part.

Men sought the confidence of the new soldier, but gave it up in ignorance as deep as that with which they came to him. Some he laughed at, some he snubbed, none he gratified. It was fortunate he knew how to fight, for there were evil spirits that would have mauled him otherwise on general principles, but Ray kept a sharp lookout for his *protégé*. He, at least, should have fair play, despite the hints of the first sergeant that Conway could tell something about him, and had even asked him, Sergeant Fellows, where he could find Hunter the night he came out with a warrant and was knifed by Healy. Ray rode to town and demanded of Conway what he knew or suspected, and Conway said, "Nothing; at least nothing that I could prove." Ray had flouted the idea of Hunter's being connected in any way with the train-robbers: indeed, it was doubtful if the leaders would ever be caught. They were lost to all search, deep in the Hills, and their luckless accomplices were still held awaiting the action of some Federal

official yet to arrive. Stannard and Mainwaring had had almost an open rupture, all on account of Hunter, who, daily exercising and training Mrs. Ray's pretty Stella, was, nevertheless, performing all other duties with his troop. Mainwaring, noting how successful Hunter had been with Stella, concluded that he should like to have him try his hand on Velvet, Mrs. Mainwaring's saddler, who had never been known to jump, and was confounded when the trooper most respectfully but positively begged to be excused. Atherton was away, summoned to meet the department commander at Pawnee. Stannard was in temporary command. Mainwaring asked that the trooper should be directed to perform duty for him, for which he was perfectly willing to pay, or else be ordered to cease doing it for Ray. Stannard said no soldier could be compelled to perform menial service for any officer if he didn't wish to, and if he did not wish to train Mrs. Mainwaring's horse he should not be made to. Mainwaring declared training horses could not be menial service in the eyes of a true cavalryman, and Stannard said that it was if a man thought so. Mainwaring got very wroth, and swore that between them, Stannard and Blake and Ray, they were bound to spoil a man who gave promise of being a good soldier, despite his shadowy antecedents, and again demanded that he be ordered to cease handling Stella for Ray. Stannard said he only did it for the love of the thing, for practice and recreation, and not for emolument, and he should not be denied. Then Atherton came back; Mainwaring appealed to him from Stannard's decision, and Atherton said he'd investigate and decide next morning.

But it was decided for him that night.

"Ray," said he, at evening stables, "whoever set that huge haystack so close to the stables had no idea of prudence. If it were to catch fire your premises would go. I shall order it removed tomorrow."

Sergeant Merriweather, stable sergeant of the troop up to a week before, heard these words, and so did Sergeant Conro, to whom he was pointing out certain defects in the mechanism of a grain-chute from the loft above their heads. It was storming, and grooming was being conducted inside. Merriweather stopped short in his explanation, stared at the colonel as though the words had dazed him in some way, and then had to be reminded of the subject which he was discussing.

The wind that had banked the snow-clouds in the southeast during the day veered towards nightfall and blew strong from the southwest. At tattoo it was whisking the hay from the quartermaster's corral and sending it streaming across the line of stables and out upon the bleak prairie, while, still farther along, under the "bench," the big hay-stacks beyond the corral seemed stripping in the gale, and the biggest of all was that which projected half-way across the open space in front of the line of gable-ends and just opposite that of Ray's troop. At tattoo the gale was almost a blizzard, and Atherton, ever on the defensive against fires, bade the troop officers look well to their company kitchens and see that all the ranges and stoves were securely banked, then went over to the guard-house in person and held brief consultation with Blake, who was officer of the day, and his officer of the guard, who, as ill

luck would have it, was Lieutenant Brady, at whom Atherton looked with scant favor. He was a young man whom Blake described as "one of the detriments of the service." He had been fairly well educated somewhere, had enlisted when it was too evident he was in no condition to make a living otherwise, but that was in the summer of '76, when twenty-five hundred men were suddenly raised by Congress to fill the gaps in the regiments engaged in the Sioux war, and the riff-raff of the Atlantic cities was rushed to the frontier. He won a company clerkship in three months, which was considered immense good luck, and lost it within the year, which was supposed to be luck as bad, but turned out to be the stepping-stone to fortune in the soldier's eyes. He was one of an escort attacked by road agents, and, in fighting desperately for his own life, had saved that of the paymaster. The sergeant and corporal with them were killed. Brady was "lanced" on the spot and came home a hero, the subject of a panegyric from the pen of the paymaster, whose uncle was a Senator of much wealth and much knowledge of mining, but little of men. He was on the paymaster's bond for a big sum, and the next thing the —th knew a stranger to their ranks appeared with a commission as second lieutenant, a glib tongue and a convivial turn, plenty of money to start with, and a letter of introduction to Atherton from a famous war general, which letter was susceptible of two interpretations and was written, there was little doubt, at the instance of the Senator in question, a prominent member of the committee on military affairs. "This will be handed you by Lieutenant Brady," said the letter, "who so distinguished himself in the affair on the Mimbres last year. The department thought best to assign him to the —th, and I have assured his friends that in consigning him to you I have placed him in the best hands possible." Senator Sivright was thoroughly satisfied, his nephew the paymaster a bit perplexed, but too wise just then to dissect any other man's motives or letters, lest his own should become objects of scrutiny. Brady proved a jolly acquisition at first, could sing a good song, tell a good story, and was "smart" in many ways and lavish in all. There was a story (put in circulation by a soldier whose reward for that Mimbres affair had been a discharge and not a commission) to the effect that when they were suddenly attacked by those desperadoes the paymaster had crawled under the wagon and cried, and Brady "allowed" when in his cups that he could tell things, and would if not "properly persuaded." Certain it is that for the first year of his service Brady spent and drank more than a second lieutenant's share. Then the Senator failed of re-election, owing possibly to some shortcomings in his mines; his nephew, the paymaster, succeeded in planning a robbery that worked better; and this opened the stagnant flow of promotion in the pay corps, and left Brady without a protector.

But he held a life office, if he behaved himself, and, being a bachelor in a regiment that spent most of its days in the inexpensive luxuries of field-service, he had managed to pay his debts and, so long as he let whiskey alone, keep out of serious trouble. But Brady and John Barleycorn never "connected" that the former did not, as Blake said, make an ass of himself, and his asininity took shape in a peculiar

form of mania that afflicts the bibulous Hibernian,—that of imagining, believing, and telling tales of deep and bloody mystery at the expense of his fellow-men in higher social esteem than himself. Friends Brady had few, enemies none worse than himself. He felt the isolation of his lot, wanted to marry, and was refused by the girls he wanted, which made him gloomier, but campaign work saved him from the solace he would have sought, and Brady had been doing fairly well, for him, when Rawson returned from leave and gave him a crony and an excuse for a start. Atherton whisked the crony off, as has been said, before much mischief was done, but he could not banish the whiskey, and Brady marched on guard the morning of this eventful day, looking much the worse for three weeks' wear and tear and little the better for two strong cocktails.

Still, he was not incapable of performing his duty, by any means, though eyes and nose held out their danger-signals. Blake had given him a sharp reminder at retreat, and Brady had taken a stiffer brace for fear of consequences. He was feeling shaky when the colonel strode into the ill-lighted room of the officer of the guard, Blake at his heels, and thus addressed him: "Mr. Brady, I want you to keep a special watch against fire to-night. Order your sentries about the stacks and stables to allow no one to approach them with pipe or cigar. Who are sentries on Numbers 5 and 6?"

Brady looked appealingly at the sergeant, who quickly produced his lists. "Reinhardt and Monahan, first relief; Blair and Scully second; Duffy and Hunter third, sir. All good men, sir."

"Hunter's our new man," said the colonel, eying sharply the officer of the guard. "Have you given him personally his orders?"

"N—not his night orders as yet, sir," said Brady, well knowing he had questioned him as to none of them, day or night.

"Well, sir," said Atherton, "you cannot be too vigilant to-night. Make frequent inspections, and see that your non-commissioned officers do likewise." Then, as once more he got out into the wind, he bent his head to avoid the blast. "Have you cautioned him, Blake? He looks anything but alert."

"I don't think he's been drinking much to-day, sir. He seems to realize that he can take no chances. I'll keep an eye on him."

There was a joyous little gathering at Ray's that night. The Mainwarings, Truscotts, and Blakes, with devoted Dr. Jayne on Miss Leroy's account, had dined there; a number of post people had dropped in later, and Miss Leroy, "looking uncommonly well, if not absolutely pretty," said a lady friend, was being made much of by everybody, despite a slight propensity on the part of some to be facetious about the daily Bible class, for that artful maiden and daughter of the church, after getting her auditors interested in tales of flood and field, had gradually led on to the introduction of holier themes. By the end of the first week the New Testament was slipped in among her books, and selected chapters were explained in very different style from anything her soldier patients had ever heard before, and these had become part of the lesson of the day. Blake declared that Father Keefe, of Butte, was getting jealous; but Miss Leroy was serenely

superior to any and all allusions or reflections. She would stoop to neither controversy nor defence. It was her faith, and that was enough. The quartermaster had laughingly suggested that he thought of getting sent to hospital so as to become one of the elect, and Miss Leroy had studied his face one moment with those clear, beautiful eyes of hers, and gravely replied that it might be necessary for him to go to even greater lengths before he could be considered worthy. Then Mainwaring had jocosely asked why she didn't start a missionary boom among the officers, whereat Miss Leroy flushed just a little and then smilingly replied that it was not because they did not need it more than the men she had met, but she had no surplus energy to waste.

"Has no surplus seed to sow on barren ground, major," interposed Blake. "You remember the parable of the hare and the tortoise." Which helped Mainwaring no whit, and only evoked a reproachful glance from Miss Leroy, seeing which Blake whispered so that several heard, "I'd wear sackcloth and ashes a week if Mainwaring could prove he knew the difference between Jacob's Ladder and Jack and the Bean-Stalk."

"Blake," remonstrated Truscott, a moment later, when he got him to one side, "you must be more prudent, not to say considerate. Mainwaring is too good a soldier to be treated with derision, and you'll make an enemy I should hate to see you have, if you continue." Blake had had other warnings. His clear-headed young wife had already seen in Mrs. Mainwaring's somewhat studied courtesy of greeting that something was amiss, and had little doubt that the major had carried home his version of the Three Guardsmen episode in the court-room, which was indeed the case, though, fortunately for Blake, Mainwaring couldn't remember the strange names so glibly given him. Mrs. Blake had sought by every gentle, tactful way in her power to make amends for her beloved Gerald's uncanny propensity to ridicule, but the wound was deeper with Mrs. Mainwaring than with the doughty major. She refused to be mollified, while he, ever tempting somebody by his irrepressible habit of launching impetuous comment or criticism at anybody whose methods differed from his own, was as constantly inviting reprisals. Relations were strained, therefore, and Blake should have been more guarded. They had even come to such a pass that Mrs. Mainwaring was finding serious fault with her niece because of a growing intimacy between her and Nannie Blake, and matters were destined to come to a climax in more than one garrison affair, and come to it this very night.

Mrs. Ray had been in ignorance of any serious difference between the Mainwarings and Blake. Indeed, she often said she did not see how anybody could take Blake seriously. But during the dinner it had become apparent more than once. Not in Mainwaring: he, as Blake put it, was mannerless as ever. Mainwaring talked as much and as loudly to Blake as he did to his hostess, on whose right he sat. There were few topics that could be discussed, outside of horse-shoeing, grooming, and company kitchens, in which Mainwaring could be considered authority, but in one and all was he disputatious, challenging

the speaker to prove the words, even, as sometimes happened, when the challenged party was a woman and entitled to assert no stronger reason than "Because."

Mainwaring carried a conversational chip on his shoulder even at dinner-parties, and to-night it had been more than ordinarily in evidence. It was after dinner, and before visitors came dropping in, and the five ladies were chatting in the parlor, that Mrs. Mainwaring's constraint towards Mrs. Blake became marked, as well as her frequent efforts at breaking in upon the cordial, friendly talk between that lady and her niece.

Finally, just after midnight, when it was time for all to be going to their homes, Blake, whose duty as officer of the day had twice called him away, again was missing. Ray promptly threw his cape over his shoulders to escort Mrs. Blake, although she lived close at hand, and with merry chat and laughter the various ladies and their escorts were trooping forth into the keen night air, when Mrs. Truscott, who was foremost, held up her hand and said, "Hush! I hear something," and her face took on an instant expression of alarm.

The wind was no longer violent, but it blew with steady force across the parade, and sounds from the direction of the guard-house near the south gate, or the stables along the east front, were carried out to the waste of prairie stretching away towards the far, pine-crested heights of the Elk range. Yet it was towards the guard-house, whose twinkling lights could be plainly seen, that Mrs. Truscott was gazing. Mainwaring was, as usual, talking loudest of the party, and was the last to cease. "Nonsense, Mrs. Truscott, you can't hear the baby crying," he almost derisively exclaimed, whereat the lady stamped a shapely foot and spoke as her father, their old colonel, would have spoken when his wife was not present, and this time with effect.

Some one, panting, came running across the parade. It was the corporal of the guard.

"Captain Ray," he cried, "Captain Blake says please come to him, quick, at the south gate."

Ray went like a shot. The corporal started to follow, but Mrs. Blake, alarmed and trembling, begged him to stop.

"What's happened?" demanded Mainwaring. "Who's hurt?"

"I don't know, sir. Nobody's hurt that I know of, but there's a patrol out."

"After some drunken man of Ray's troop,—that's all," said Mainwaring, "and Blake don't want to put him under guard. See if it ain't. Come," he said, tendering an arm to his wife.

But Mrs. Blake knew her own mind, and, without a word of reply, started straight across the road in the direction taken by Ray.

"Oh, don't go, Mrs. Blake;" "Don't go, Nannie;" "I'm sure it's nothing serious," were the various cries that followed her, but she never faltered. "Good-night," she cried; "I'm going to Gerald." Reluctantly the doctor called after her,—

"Oh, wait, Mrs. Blake. If you must go, I'll—I'll escort you."

"Yes," said Miss Leroy, firmly, "and take me too." Saying which, she started her escort almost on a run.

"Pet—Kate—indeed I protest. Indeed you must not go!" called Mrs. Mainwaring, loudly.

"Aw, Kate, don't be so idiotic," shouted the major, but all to no purpose. "Pet" and her obedient Æsculapius were already in swift pursuit, and, if not out of hearing, out of sight.

And then, all of a sudden, the eastward gable ends of the barracks, the east side of the guard-house tower, the topmast of the tall white flag-staff, were all for one brief instant flashed on the night in a lurid glare, and as suddenly died out of sight. Away over beyond the edge of the bluff a dull, smothered, booming sound smote the wintry air, and something shook the windows and caused the earth to tremble. Then a carbine cracked and a sentry yelled, half stifled; then came a distant sound of crackling, like pistol-shots; a trumpet pealed, and sounds of rush and scurry followed. There was only one explanation, —the magazine.

CHAPTER X.

It was eleven-thirty that night when Corporal Judkins, posting his relief, came stumbling along the rough ground below the "bench," and turned into the flat between the quartermaster's hay-stacks and the stables. No. 5 he had posted at the east gate and picked up the shivering sentry who for two mortal hours had been swearing and trotting up and down in vain effort to keep warm. No. 6, down among the shadows of the stacks and stables, was not so easy to find. When at last his challenge was heard, he leaped from the shelter of the very stack that had called forth the colonel's condemnation that evening at stables, and, between cold and excitement—or something, was incoherent in his formula for receiving relief, and had to be sharply prompted by the corporal in turning over his orders. "What's the matter with you, Scully?" snarled the corporal. "You talk as if you'd been asleep. Turn over your orders, man, and don't keep us shivering here."

The tall soldier who was to relieve him stood patiently, with his carbine at port. Silently he listened to the mumbled words, "Allow no one to approach the stables or stacks with lighted pipe or cigar. Allow no vehicles to be driven to or from the stables, or horses taken out except in presence of a commissioned officer, stable sergeant, or non-commissioned officer of the guard. Be on the alert for fires, and keep special lookout for the sparks from laundresses' quarters when they start their fires in the morning——" And then Judkins cut him short.

"You've got 'em twisted; but *you* know them all, don't you, Hunter?"

The tall recruit nodded.

"Take your post," said the corporal. "Fall in, Scully. Darned lot of use you'd be to-night. You smell as if you'd been drinking."

"I wish *I* had, bedad," shivered No. 2. "Go on, corporal, or we'll never get thawed." And in a moment more the tramp of the footsteps died away, and Hunter was alone.

He was warmly clad, for, in addition to the fur cap and gauntlets, heavy overshoes had been added to the soldier's equipment for winter duty dismounted, and, as there was every indication of snow, the guard had been ordered to wear them this night. Then in Ray's troop they had a knack of keeping hot coffee in the kitchen on the bitter winter nights for the benefit of their guards, and, though it reminded him but feebly of the fragrant Mocha of other days and climes, it had cheered him not a little, and he felt alert and vigorous and independent as he began patrolling his lonely post. Along the bluff to the westward the black bulk of the barracks loomed up against the starry sky. Between him and them were, close at hand, the huge hay-stacks, and then the scattered huts and cottages of the married men. In one or two of these faint night lights were glowing. Several children had been ailing, and there were anxious hearts among the lowly. But there were no little ones at Merriweather's, yet a dim light shone from the southward window. What manner of man was Merriweather, anyway? pondered the sentry, as, pacing briskly up the open space before the stables, he went over in mind the adventure now nearly two weeks gone by. Never once, by word or act, had the sergeant shown the faintest intention to seek satisfaction for the blow that had floored him. True, he never spoke to Hunter, never seemed to see him, and the accident to Stella and himself might, despite all the sergeant's protests to his captain, have been the result of his design. Once, twice, Hunter had seen Mrs. Merriweather, but at such a distance that speech with her was out of the question, even had he sought it. But she had seen him and looked long and meaningly at him, and he could not but know it. For some reason Merriweather saw fit to hide the facts connected with his absence from tattoo that night, and, so long as no one in authority questioned, it was not Hunter's province to explain.

Keeping vigilant lookout on every side as he paced up and down, the soldier gave his thoughts free rein. He was glad to be alone to think and plan. There was no glamour about soldiering as he had found it, and it was useless denying even to himself that he would gladly have recalled his rash enlistment, but, that being impossible, grit and pride asserted themselves and bade him stand to his guns and give no sign. Barring the inquisitive proddings of the men, he had had no active annoyances after the first few days. Would-be tormentors respected a man who was so free with his fists—and his money. His officers, except Mainwaring, had treated him with grave and distant courtesy, for of Brady he had seen nothing at all until this day. News from home and abroad he had had none and wanted none. It was his purpose to shut himself out from the old world for good and all. Parents he had lost in early boyhood. Brothers and sisters he had none. Sweethearts—two. One,—the first,—his senior by at least four years, and now a staid wife and mother. The second might or might not be wearing a coronet by this time. His Grace of Lancaster was on his last legs, and his eldest hope, Lord Lunemouth, on his last lung, when Gray left Switzerland in April. That "Amy, shallow-hearted," had wedded Rokeby by this time was possible, if not probable. There were New York papers in the post library, but Hunter had seen

none, would see none. In his stern renunciation of the world, the flesh, and the devil of his old life, Trooper Hunter would admit no interest in the doings of Gotham. The one thing that bound him to the old life was the knowledge that, up to October at least, his fond old uncle was still in the land of the living. A stroke of some kind had prostrated him before Gray's return from abroad. Physicians had prescribed a long sea-voyage. Mr. and Mrs. Darcy Hunter had sailed for North Cape, had gone thence to some German spa. His health was shattered, his mind almost a blank. She was still in the prime of life. He, said the last news Darcy had of him before starting for the wide West, hardly recognized his attendants. She bore her sorrows with the patient resignation of the Christian who knows there's life for her beyond the grave—of a departed husband.

Of the remnant of his fortune Gray had still a few thousand dollars banked where it would be safe until sorely needed. Under an humble roof within the limits of Butte were stored certain trunks containing civilian clothing and things he valued. Here at barracks he had only his soldier outfit of uniform, with the addition of better underwear and shoes than were issued by Uncle Sam. One poor fellow and his suffering wife, at least, were the better for the strange coming of this eccentric: the starving tramp who boarded the train that night at Willow Springs had now a roof over his head and hers, and food, fire, and clothing. She was sufficiently recovered to take in washing, for Chinamen were unpopular if not unprofitable servants just then in Wyoming, and he, the starveling of that night on the train, was once more a carpenter, his tools out of pawn and he no longer out of work. That man's actual misery and suffering, all for the lack of a few dollars, no more than he, Hunter Gray, had been accustomed to throw away on cigars or sundries in the course of a month, had opened the eyes of the world-weary traveller and given him food for thought and spur to action.

One anxiety had oppressed him since his voluntary entrance upon the task of training Stella, a duty which need have occupied but a few days had it not been for that untoward mishap. She fought shy of the bar for several lessons thereafter, connecting it and the flapping blanket unerringly with her violent fall. Hunter's anxiety was that any afternoon when so occupied he might find Mrs. Mainwaring and her niece among the lookers-on, and he shrank from recognition. He had even sought to get his captain to change the hour to morning, but there had been fine, open weather, and Atherton lost no opportunities for battalion drills. Hunter took to these, despite the crowding and squeezing when in line, like a duck to the water, but all the same he would have preferred giving Stella her lesson when he knew Miss Leroy to be engaged at the hospital, for the fame of that benevolent young lady's work had spread throughout the barracks as well as the quarters.

And it was of her and that odd introduction he was thinking now, as he briskly tramped up and down, peering among the hay-stacks and stables. Just before the midnight call his post had been visited by the sergeant of the guard, who inquired as to his orders and bade him look

out any moment for Captain Blake or Lieutenant Brady. The midnight call of the sentries went round in rather slipshod fashion, thanks to the wind, but no sooner had Hunter shouted the prolonged "All's well" than he wished he could recall it. Not a suspicious sight or sound had he noted after the sergeant went his way, but now, before he could realize or dodge, something came spinning through mid-air, over his head, settled down on his shoulders with a jerk; then a blanket was whirled about his face, and, with his breath fairly choked out of him, with only time for one startled, stifled cry, the loop of a lariat was suddenly drawn taut, hurling him violently to the frozen ground, and in another second two or three men had thrown themselves furiously upon him. Despite mad struggles, he was bound, gagged, and kicked behind the hay-stack. His carbine was whisked away. He lay there helpless and half strangled, but they had removed the blanket, so that he at least could breathe and see. And then from beyond the stable of his troop came two more men with a cart. Into this was swiftly loaded box after box of some weighty substance, the boxes being dragged from underneath the very stack that had caused the colonel's censure,—the stack that interposed between Ray's stable and the little domicile of Sergeant Merriweather under the low bluff. Loaded with all it could safely carry, the cart was swiftly trundled off into the darkness, three burly forms propelling, two remaining close at hand. Not a word was spoken that Hunter could hear. The cart came back for another load in less than five minutes, and this time, in addition to heavy little boxes which he could almost swear contained ammunition and, possibly, revolvers, they dragged sacks of oats from underneath the stack, and loaded them too upon the cart. Three trips were made in all, then every man vanished and he was utterly alone.

Raging at his plight, powerless to help himself in any way, and suffering not a little from the sharpness of his cords and the brutal manner in which he had been gagged, Hunter managed to keep cool and think. At the utmost he probably would not be left there more than twenty minutes. When the call was passed at twelve-thirty his voice would be missed; the corporal would have to come down, and, not finding him on his post, would institute search; then he would be released and could tell his story.

Even as he lay there he could swear he heard the sound as of hoofs and heavy-laden wheels crashing through the ice on the little shallow stream beyond the stables. Presently the bitter cold of the frozen ground seemed to penetrate through his heavy clothing, and he began to suffer keenly. The wind blew but lightly where he lay in the lee of the stack, and, though he knew it was not time for the sentries to call off, he strained his ears to catch the sound of footfalls,—Blake or Brady,—and the sergeant, too, might be along again. He prayed indeed they might be, for robbery had been committed before his very eyes. He had heard rumors of the disappearance of forage. He had heard the men talk of the exposed situation of the brick magazine out there on the prairie, southeast of the post. Only on bright moonlit nights could the sentry see it from the east gate, while from the south gate it was hidden entirely. He knew that most of the ammunition,

pistol, carbine, and cannon, was kept there, and at one time quite a lot of small-arms. The ordnance sergeant slept in the garrison, his keys in a strong box under his bed, yet thieves had plundered both the magazine and the stables, and hidden their booty underneath the big hay-stack, awaiting opportunity to run it away to some reliable customer in town. That they were members of the garrison was evident from that very fact. Townsfolk would have come with wagons in the first place.

Fifteen minutes at least had he still to wait and suffer, possibly more, if no officer of the guard chanced to inspect right after twelve, or if the corporal should be slow running to ascertain why the twelve-thirty call was not repeated. Fifteen minutes, and already he was enduring torment. Then came sudden hope,—the sound of a swift, light footfall,—then a woman's voice.

"Dan! Danny! where are you? Come home quick, for God's sake. They're hunting for you now."

No answer.

Again the plaintive cry was repeated. A woman's slender form sped swiftly by, turned the corner of the huge stack, and then, as though recoiling at sight of danger, darted back, shuddering, stumbled over his prostrate body, and only with difficulty saved itself from falling. Quick as thought the woman whirled upon him, one half-stifled, nervous cry escaping from her lips.

"Scully, you beast! Why are you lying there? You are not drunk. The liquor he gave you wouldn't do this. Where's he gone? Answer, I say. Ah-h!" And the cold hands that had seized and shaken him fell away in fright at touch of the gag. Quickly she recovered herself, fumbled in her pocket, found a pair of scissors, and slashed the bands that were strangling him. "What fool work is this?" she whimpered. "Sure Dan shouldn't have gagged you, Scully. Who was with him? Who did it? Answer," she implored, shaking him vehemently. "Get up, Scully, quick! For the love of God find him! They've been to the house already—the guard. Somebody's peached. Somebody—— Who tied this lariat? It's knotted like—— Wait till I get a knife. Lie still, Scully." And away she sped, leaving him to wonder, bound as he was, how he could lie otherwise. She was back in a moment, panting, breathless. She sawed at the thick cordage until it snapped, then stared wildly one instant as the tall figure straightened up, then with a cry of horror started back. "Scully—No! What?—you? Hunter? Oh, blessed saints, have mercy!"

But the instant he was released and had gained his feet, unarmed though he was and half numbed, the tall, athletic soldier sprang away into the darkness and ran like a deer across the open space and on past the stables towards the stream, shouting as he ran at the full strength of his powerful lungs, "Corporal of the guard, Number 6! Corporal of the guard, Number 6!"

Out on the low bank across the narrow stream he could see, outlined against the sky, two dark, shadowy figures go scurrying swiftly by, running from the direction of the old magazine. It stood only a

few yards beyond the crest. Again he set up his powerful shout, "Corporal of the guard, Number 6!" and away off to the northeast, although farther than himself from the guard-house, Duffy on No. 5 at the east gate, sure that something was dreadfully amiss, was repeating the cry. Hardly knowing what he should do if he overtook them, Hunter dashed into the shallow stream, in hopes of reaching the opposite bank and overhauling the marauders, but the broken, slippery ice trapped and threw him again. Down he went splash into the chilling waters; up he scrambled, only to slip and go down a second time; then staggered to his feet, breathless, almost exhausted now; tumbled up the opposite bank; clambered on all-fours to the crest; gazed hurriedly about in search of friend or foe; peered into the darkness to the south and southwest, but the runners had disappeared; then gazed to the east and sprang to his feet, startled. Not twenty yards away loomed the black bulk of the old brick magazine, and, hissing and sputtering, a fiery serpent seemed dancing in front. It bounded to the door-way, now in the ruddy light dimly seen to be open, disappeared within a little cloud of sulphur smoke, and then the heavens lit up with an awful glare; he felt himself hurled violently backward; for one instant he seemed to see a million stars criss-crossing through the skies; his ears were stunned and deafened by a thunderous roar; the air was filled with flying bricks and beams and sheets of flame that scorched and seared and blinded him. Then something crashed upon his skull, and he toppled over the bank and went plunging down to the icy flood beneath.

CHAPTER XI.

NOVEMBER had given way to a still more wintry month, and December, cold, clear, snow-white, and sparkling, chained the streams in icy fetters and spread abroad its fleecy blanket. The holidays were drawing nigh, and garrison children were revelling in hope and whispered rumors of the great times to come. There was to be a Christmas-tree in the post hall, with presents for all the little ones. Miss Leroy was managing everything, and what Miss Leroy undertook went with a dash. The afternoons now were given up to all manner of sewing and stitching and contriving, dressing dolls and filling cornucopias and parcelling out gifts so that no child should be overlooked or forgotten, but never once did Miss Leroy neglect her morning Bible class, for such it had become, and into the fold were gladly drawn, not only convalescent patients in hospital, but volunteers from barracks and quarters who had no bodily ills, but who rejoiced in souls in need of saving. Ransom had no chaplain in those days, or sectarian piety might have taken alarm at the rapid increase in Miss Leroy's weekday Sunday-school. Two of the most devout and regular attendants of late were Sergeant and Mrs. Merriweather. Drills were suspended, it being now too cold and snowy, and Miss Leroy's hospital services began regularly at ten. She would enter, bright, smiling, happy-faced, go at once to her little desk, and open the ball. Now,

the Scriptures came first,—there was no longer doubt as to the main object of her charitable enterprise,—but when the lessons of the day were disposed of, and a brief sermon read from the collection of some famous divine, the barrack squad and Sudstown people would retire, and she could then devote another hour to lighter reading for the benefit of her patients exclusively, some of whom were still in the ward with the graver cases.

And among these latter, with bandaged eyes and burned and blistered face and hands, an unrecognizable bundle of bandages, lay Trooper Hunter, over whose head, unseen, unknown, there was hanging a sword.

For some days and nights concussion of the brain was feared. The magazine had been blown into a thousand fragments, and how many of these, beams or bricks, had felled him, no one ever knew. He was hauled out of the stream, feet first, like poor Pat Shea, bleeding, burned, and senseless. He began to mend in a few days, however, and by the 8th of December was occasionally sitting up in an invalid chair, his eyes and cheeks still under cover. But from the time his convalescence began, Trooper Hunter had spent two hours each morning listening to the voice of the charmer who charmed so wisely, and there came a day when she bent over his couch and laid her cool soft white hand on his forehead and asked him if there were nothing she could do, no friends or relatives to whom he would like her to write, and he murmured that he couldn't think of any just then, but might if she'd come again to ask him on the morrow. She came, and on the next and the next day, too, marvelling not a little at the voice, the intelligence, the language, of this particular patient. She strove to study his features, but without success, for when the doctor thought to remove the bandages the patient declared the morning light was altogether too much for his weakened eyes. He would be bandaged in the morning, though the afternoon sunshine was really more brilliant, and he didn't seem to mind it then. Miss Leroy took to sitting by Hunter's bedside as much as ten minutes at first; then the ten began to lengthen to fifteen and even twenty, and other patients waxed impatient and said things about Hunter and thought things about her that proved how jealous is the human heart, even when it beats beneath a flannel shirt. The surgeon said Hunter could soon return to his troop, as far as his health was concerned, but there were reasons to fear his health might suffer after he got there, for Major Mainwaring, now in temporary command of the post, was making frequent and impetuous inquiries. Colonel and Mrs. Atherton had gone East on two months' leave; Major and Mrs. Stannard had gone to Russell for a fortnight to visit old friends in another regiment; and here, to his huge delight, was Mainwaring in command of an eight-company post. Then the surgeon asked why Mainwaring was so anxious to have the patient out, and learned something that proved a painful shock.

"Well, major," said he, after a solemn silence, "of course you're commanding officer, but I find it mighty hard to believe that story, and I protest against its being made known to him until he is strong enough to bear it,—which he isn't now."

There had been much talk at the hospital, among the stewards and attendants and patients who could talk at all, as to the result of the board of survey promptly convened at Colonel Atherton's request to ascertain the cause of the mysterious explosion which had wrecked the magazine and ruined its contents, and it did not take long for such keen scouts and trailers as Ray, Blake, and old Wilkins to make up their minds. Coupled with what had occurred at the south gate that night, just a little while before the explosion, there was no doubt that an extensive robbery had taken place and that the object of the destruction of the magazine was the obliteration with it of evidences of the crime.

It seemed that shortly before eleven-thirty that night two veteran sergeants of Truscott's troop, returning from Butte on pass, became aware of a wagon driving ahead of them as they left town and soon disappearing out on the prairie east of the road. Now there was not a ranch or house to which it could have gone; everything of that kind lay farther down the stream, where it swept in bold curve, first to the south, then eastward again. Rumors of forage-stealing they had heard, and therefore decided to find where the wagon went, but after searching awhile in the gale and the darkness they gave it up, yet warned the sergeant of the guard as they alighted at the south gate, and their hack-driver returned with his rig to town. Captain Blake was notified, and a patrol was ordered out to scour the right bank of the little stream that flowed back of the stables. They hadn't gone fifty yards before they stirred up a squad of troopers that scattered at their approach, but one was captured,—Ray's rapscallion of a trumpeter "the Kid," —and the Kid refused flatly and characteristically to say who the others were. A privileged character was the Kid. He had been ten years or more in the regiment, and ten dozen times in scrapes. A better little soldier on campaign or a worse one in garrison couldn't be found in all the —th, and as the regiment had spent more of those ten years in the field than in the fort, the Kid had still a small balance to his credit. He had a medal of honor from Congress for heroism in fierce, savage battle, and a record for deviltry of every conceivable kind. Ray was the only man, except Atherton, he either feared or loved. Grinning from ear to ear, he told Blake that there wasn't any officer in the regiment smart enough to scare him into giving away a fellow-soldier, and Blake sent for Ray. Something told him there was mischief afoot, and Ray and the explosion came almost together.

Only two men in all Fort Ransom, however, were found to have anything to explain as to their whereabouts that night: first, Sergeant Merriweather, whom the sergeant of the guard had inquired for just after visiting sentries, and solely because a light was burning so late in his window. The second was the new trooper, Hunter, found nearly three hundred yards away from his proper post, blinded, senseless, bleeding, and half drowned. The Kid had told the plausible tale that "him and three other fellers was sneaking off to town for a lark" when detected. Merriweather declared that he had heard horses stamping and snorting in the stables, and had considered it his duty, though no longer stable sergeant, to go and investigate, and that he

saw no sentry on No. 6, but hunted up and down for him, wondering where he could be, and was so occupied when the explosion occurred. But Hunter had not yet been approached. There were reasons why it was deemed best to let him suppose no suspicion attached to him.

For, no sooner was it light enough to see, the morning after the explosion, than Atherton had some of his best officers scouring the prairie for traces. They found bricks, bullets, and unexploded boxes of cartridges all over the neighborhood, but not one of the forty revolvers and only twenty of the eighty boxes of carbine, rifle, and revolver cartridges that should have been there. Of the barrel of rifle powder and half-barrel of cannon cartridges not a vestige, of course, remained. All this was brought out by the board, and, the board's findings having been sent to Department head-quarters, Atherton, as has been said, had gone off on leave; so had Stannard, and this left Mainwaring in command.

"Not a word, not a hint to that fellow until I tell you," said Mainwaring to the post surgeon, who, an older man and a major senior in rank by several years, was nevertheless his inferior in the eyes of military law and regulation, he being debarred from assuming command. And so, as Hunter grew stronger every day and watched with eagerness for the coming each morning of the young devotee, there dawned upon him no ray of suspicion of the toils that were surrounding him, for Miss Leroy, who used to talk at home of her pupil patients, had become silent as to one at least, and uncommunicative as to all, for Mrs. Mainwaring of late had expressed her disapprobation in no measured terms, and there was no longer that sweet accord which should obtain between aunt and niece.

One bright morning the doctor bade Hunter lay aside the shrouding bandages entirely and wear only a green shade over the eyes. Orders were orders, but when Miss Leroy entered and as usual spoke to him, a dainty handkerchief was pressed to his face. The light, he said, was still too dazzling.

"But you are much better," said she, in her clear tones. "The doctor says you can soon return to light duty, probably before Christmas."

Then as she took her seat to read, her side face towards him, he slipped the kerchief a little to one side that he might gaze undisturbed.

The men had asked that she should give fifteen minutes at least to the leading events of the day, and a Chicago paper was selected for their edification. From this she chose such items as she thought might prove of interest, and to these Hunter listened, in spite of himself. First she read of the political news; then the doings of great dignitaries, foreign and domestic; and then came accidents by flood and field, and another railway hold-up on a small scale. To all these he lent but languid ear. He was watching with eager eyes the movements of those soft, sensitive, curved red lips. He hardly paid even faint attention to what she was saying, until something in the names struck him as familiar. All the foremost part of the paragraph had passed unheard, unheeded, but now, now only by strong effort could he restrain himself from sitting bolt upright in bed and reaching out and seizing

the paper and reading for himself; for what she read, when once again he became conscious of her words, was this:

"The overturned yacht now lies in forty feet of water, her taper masts and upper rigging all that remain visible. Mr. Hunter is doing well, carefully attended by Dr. Lambert at the Hôtel des Ambassadeurs. The bodies of Mrs. Hunter and her unfortunate friends will doubtless be recovered this morning. The ladies were caught in the cabin when the Amorita was struck, and escape was impossible. She went to the bottom like a shot. English and American residents are in deep grief. The ball-room at the Casino last night was almost deserted. Many New York and Philadelphia families are at Nice for the winter, and the tragic fate of Mrs. Hunter has cast a gloom over the community. Mr. Hunter had greatly improved in health, but it is feared this bereavement may again prostrate him. They have no children."

The Amorita? That yacht was owned by a wealthy English admirer of his uncle's wife. For more reasons than one, Hunter Gray had never fancied him, and even his easy-going uncle seemed to hold aloof. But Mrs. Hunter, so much her husband's junior in years, loved society, adored yachting, and what was more necessary for her beloved invalid's recovery than the soft sea-breezes of the Riviera and the idyllic *dolce far niente* days and nights under those incomparable Mediterranean skies and on the Amorita's dainty deck? There was a late supper going on one joyous night aboard, just as she was coming in from a day's dancing over the blue waters. There was misunderstanding between her skipper and that of a steamer over the right of way,—signals, or God knows what,—for when the Amorita rounded to the cruel black prow struck her amidships and ground her underneath the iron keel. Through the devotion of the crew Mr. Hunter and one or two friends with him were rescued. They were on deck. But nothing could save the hapless banqueters still below. Darcy Hunter had survived the wreck of his business, the wreck of the Amorita,—had survived even his young, light-hearted wife, with whose remains, said the paper, he would return to America at once.

CHAPTER XII.

THAT evening when the surgeon was making his visit to the hospital the steward told him Trooper Hunter desired to speak with him, and, halting somewhat in his gait and looking very pallid still, but otherwise little the worse for wear, the tall soldier was ushered into the dispensary.

The junior medical officer, for reasons the senior could not quite fathom, had on several occasions recently asked the senior if he did not think Hunter fit to return to light duty, and gave his opinion that he was getting soft and lazy there. The post surgeon, for reasons the junior could not fathom at all, replied that he thought it might be several days before he should permit Hunter to return to his troop.

This in no wise added to Jayne's good will towards his gentlemanly and attractive patient. Hunter was fortunate in having won the sympathy of the senior. To-night he won something more.

Standing bolt upright at the door, he said,—

"May I speak one moment with the colonel, in private?"

The surgeon almost blushed as he whirled towards the speaker. All through the war of the rebellion he had served, a gallant, skilful, devoted officer, ever seeking duty at the front, ever ready night or day to brave peril, hardship, or fatigue to go with his regiment into action. Time and again he had dashed with them into battle. More than once he had cheered them in headlong charge until recalled to himself and duties that bade him sheathe the sword for the scalpel. Scorning to leave his wounded, he had fallen with them into the hands of the enemy and had starved with them at Andersonville. Once he had been seriously wounded as he knelt beside a stricken comrade on the battle-line. Twice he had been offered hospital duty at Annapolis and Washington, and declined. From one end of the war to the other he had been known among the men as the fighting doctor, and the fame had followed him to the far frontier, where in one long and fierce campaign against the Sioux he had spared himself no hardship that the humblest soldier had to endure; and the cavalry swore by him, ay, and the lithe, sinewy, hard-marching, hard-fighting doughboys too, and loved him for the love he bore them. With all he was a student of his trade and gloried in it, but most he gloried that he was a soldier. He looked it, lived it, deserved it and everything the name implied; but he had one weakness, if weakness honest glory in one's profession could be called. "I've been a soldier twenty years of my life. I've won the brevets of major and lieutenant-colonel on the battle-field and colonel for the war, but never have I been called or can I look to be called anything but doctor. Here are your paymasters, commissaries, quartermasters,—fellows that never heard a hostile bullet whistle or saw the smoke of battle,—lots of 'em; you call *them* captain or major, as though they were soldiers, but you snub, by God! the one staff corps that never leaves the fighting-line when the fighting begins."

Now, the surgeon had come but lately to Ransom. He had served but a few weeks with the —th, yet Truscott and Ray had discovered his sensitiveness and gladly hailed him as colonel. Blake promptly followed suit; but when Mainwaring heard it, Mainwaring bristled. "What right's a d—d doctor to expect to be called anything but doctor?" he asked, explosively, and he no more meant to be offensive, or thought he could be considered offensive, in his language than did the doctor in claiming recognition as a soldier. And then, as Mainwaring prided himself on "never saying behind a fellow's back what he wouldn't say to his face,"—and the Lord only knew what he hadn't said to people's faces,—what did the major do, only that very day, but, in attempted jocularity, pitch into the post surgeon at the morning gathering of the officers and try to chaff him about wanting to be called colonel! It stung the honest old soldier-surgeon to the quick. It hurt him sore, and he left the room disgusted.

And so, when from the lips of this tall trooper came the title he

valued, the post surgeon fairly blushed, for he had been thinking intently over the events of the morning, and, if the truth must be told, was wondering how he could get square with Major Mainwaring, and here was a possible opportunity.

Obedient to his superior's nod, the hospital steward went out, closing the door behind him.

"What is it, Hunter?" asked the surgeon, kindly.

"I have come to ask, sir, if it would be possible for me to return to my troop to-night, and if the colonel could aid me in any way to get a furlough of twenty or thirty days."

Colonel Connell looked up, perplexed, even troubled. Both requests were unusual from old soldiers, and never heard of from recruits.

"I fear not, Hunter. You see, there are reasons why you ought not to attempt to return to duty yet; and what can you allege as reason for a furlough so soon after enlistment?"

"Urgent personal affairs, sir," was the answer, a half-smile twitching at the corners of the handsome mouth. "Even a trooper may have them, you know."

"Hunter," said the surgeon, after a moment's pause, "be advised by me. Don't think of going back to duty for two or three days yet, and don't let any one know you wish to leave Ransom on any account, just now."

For a moment there was silence. The soldier still remained respectfully at attention, standing close to the door. The surgeon had spoken impressively, earnestly, significantly, and Hunter could not but notice it, could not but realize that behind it there was some urgent meaning or reason, yet he persisted.

"I hope the colonel will pardon me," he said. "I will not refer to the furlough again until I can explain more fully, which will be possible after I have talked with Captain Ray; but as to returning to the troop I beg that I may not be detained here through—another morning."

The surgeon was seated in a wicker-bottom office chair, which he twisted round and so squarely faced his visitor, looking keenly yet not unkindly into the pale, handsome face. It was a moment before he spoke.

"I thought you greatly appreciated those morning readings," said he, at last. "I'm sure the young lady has done very much to make hospital life bearable."

It was Hunter's turn to color, but before he could speak he had to spring aside. Into the outer hall came banging a burly form enwrapped in cavalry circular. "Where's Dr. Connell?" brusquely demanded a loud, unmodulated voice, then slap-bang, with all his characteristic impetuosity, Mainwaring burst into the room.

Direct as ever, never noting or caring who was present, he went straight to the point. "Hullo, doc!" said he, loud, gruff, yet hearty. "Just the man I'm looking for. Say, Truscott tells me I hurt your feelings this morning, and I've come to 'pologize. I didn't mean a d—d thing. It's all right. If you want to be called colonel, why,

colonel it shall be. I'll issue orders calling the attention of the whole command to it, if you like."

And then for the first time he became aware of the tall soldier, now trying to slip quietly behind him so as to leave the room. Mainwaring whirled on him in a trice. "Hullo, you're up again, are you? —Well, this man's able to answer for himself now, I see, doc—er—colonel?"

But the post surgeon had risen from his chair and held up a hand appealingly.

"He is still a patient under my charge, sir, and is not restored to health or duty as yet. I protest——"

"Oh, you needn't protest. I'm done for the present. I'm giving way to everybody this evening, all on your account." Here the surgeon signalled significantly to the soldier, and, silently, wonderingly, Hunter withdrew. "'Tisn't only Truscott. My wife's jumped on me with both feet; says I've insulted you,—done nothing but make enemies ever since I came into the —th. Why, I've been catching it right and left, doc—colonel; haven't had a moment's peace. What d'ye think that dash-dashed long-legged lath of a man Blake says to me, not an hour ago, begad? I asked him if he thought you had any right to feel offended, and he said if you didn't it was only because everybody agreed that no notice was to be taken of anything I ever said. I never know whether he's in earnest or joking. If I thought he meant what he said, by God, he'd be in arrest this minute."

Again the post surgeon held up a warning hand. "Pray do not speak quite so loud, Mainwaring," said he. "Some of my patients are trying to sleep. I beg you will think no more of this morning's incident. What you have said is more than sufficient. I am possibly hypersensitive."

And then it was the doctor's turn to be abruptly silenced. For a second time the outer door was hurriedly opened, silvery voices and soft laughter were heard in the corridor, and then, marshalled by Blake, there at the entrance stood Mrs. Mainwaring, and behind her, silent and a trifle pale and anxious-looking, Kate Leroy.

"I knew he'd be coming right over here," laughed Mrs. Mainwaring. "But, really, Colonel Connell, my husband is even more impetuous in rushing to make amends than he is in treading on people's tender spots.—No, don't go wandering off to the wards, Kate," she cried, for Miss Leroy looked anxiously up the corridor and showed a tendency to follow her eyes. "Come now, major, if you have finished what you were saying to the colonel, we want you to come home. Indeed," she persisted, as she saw how angrily his eyes were regarding Blake, "you've got to come and make your peace with us now, for you were simply unbearable all through dinner, and we had to ask Captain Blake to escort us in search of you." Then, as Mainwaring still held back as though striving to speak, she seized his arm. "Come. Indeed," lowering her voice, "I must speak with you before you go any further in that case." And then did Connell feel sure she spoke of Hunter.

An instant later he was surer still, for in came an attendant, alarm on his face.

"Did the post surgeon give Hunter permission to leave hospital? He's picked up his coat and gone, sir."

Outside the moon was shining brightly on the glistening snow. Objects were plainly visible over one hundred yards away. Mainwaring sprang to the door with excitement in his eyes and flew to the porch, the others following, in every stage of astonishment. Outside the gate, as luck would have it, was marching a relief of the guard, the men swinging rapidly by in their heavy winter dress, the carbine butts grasped in their fur-gloved hands, the gleaming barrels tossed over the shoulder. Over towards the trader's store a tall, slender form in soldier's overcoat was rapidly striding. Mainwaring's voice rang out with the force and volume of a trombone. "Halt your relief, corporal! Catch that man over yonder, quick, and bring him here."

Astonished, the corporal obeyed. "Relief, halt!" he ordered. "Come with me, two of you." Then away he rushed. "Halt! Halt, you!" were the next shouts, and all in a moment they had overhauled the offending soldier. There was brief parley, and then back they came, the unresisting prisoner between the two members of the guard.

"Oh," almost whimpered Mrs. Mainwaring, "do hear Captain Blake first. He's sure there's some mistake——" then broke off short with exclamation of amaze. From the lips of Kate Leroy, too, there burst a stifled cry, for there before them, his clear-cut, refined face perfectly outlined in the brilliant moonlight,—there, clad in the rough garb of a private soldier, stood the courteous, helpful, distinguished-looking stranger of the night of the collision.

Mainwaring must have had a love for the dramatic.

"Corporal Rice," said he, deliberately, "take Trooper Hunter to the guard-house and confine him by my order on the charge of conniving at the robbery and destruction of the magazine."

CHAPTER XIII.

In the forty-eight hours that followed the arrest and incarceration of Trooper Hunter one excitement chased another with such rapidity that it was hard to keep track of them, and Mainwaring, with almost a sigh of relief, welcomed the premature return of old Stannard, to whom somebody (believed to be Ray) had given the tip by telegraph that the sooner he got back the better.

"Take this infernal regiment and see what you can do with it," said Mainwaring, despairingly. "I thought I knew something about soldiering, but there's too d—d much individuality in the —th for me."

And, beside Trooper Hunter's incarceration on the charge of aiding and abetting in the robbery and destruction of the magazine, the senior major had the following matters now to tackle: Captain Blake, in arrest for using insubordinate language to the commanding officer ("said that compared with my mental condition the magazine wasn't a circumstance in the way of a wreck, begad," explained Mainwaring to his

senior, who strove to keep a straight face, but couldn't); Mrs. Merriweather, disappeared since the night of Hunter's transfer from hospital to guard-house; Sergeant Merriweather, transferred from guard-house to hospital with a bullet through one lung and a knife-wound in the other; Corporal Croxford and Trooper Elzey, deserted,—two hitherto shining lights of the garrison and admirers of Mrs. Merriweather (could Mrs. Merriweather have gone with either of them? asked some of the ladies, or with both? asked certain brutes among the officers); and, finally, Lieutenant Brady, back from a bacchanalian bout with his kindred spirit Rawson, and now laid by the heels in quarters with an Irish orderly in attendance, for doctors would have nothing to do with him.

The way Stannard sailed in was characteristic. Brady had not been drunk on duty. He had taken advantage of the absence of Atherton and Stannard to relax the reins of his self-control, but had only got a real good start when he sought and received a seven days' leave from Major Mainwaring, which enabled him to meet Rawson at Pawnee. This was about ten days after the explosion. He was to have stayed his week away, but in two days suddenly reappeared in Butte, full of whiskey and information. Mainwaring, who knew him but slightly, received a despatch saying that he had news of most important character resulting from discoveries he had made at Pawnee, and urging the commanding officer to meet him at the railway station on his arrival, which Mainwaring did, and then the very next night ordered Hunter's arrest.

"I always said that when Brady drank he could be depended upon to make an ass of himself," said Blake, "and this proves it." But what Brady's revelations might have been Mainwaring refused to disclose. It was enough, he said, to hang Hunter high as the hayman, and the hay-contractor, in Mainwaring's opinion, was the double-dashedest scoundrel that ever lived. This statement so rejoiced Blake's heart that he repeated it broadcast, and was in the merriest of moods, until he heard that Mainwaring had forbidden Captain Ray's having an interview with his imprisoned recruit. Then Blake boiled over and made the odious comparison between Mainwaring's brain and the blown-up building which resulted in his own summary confinement to quarters. Brady's leave had still two days to run when Stannard got back, but Stannard had heard enough of his doings in Butte to warrant the immediate action taken. An officer was sent with the post ambulance and orders to fetch him forthwith. Then and there Dana waited on him with the major's message to the effect that he would give him twenty-four hours in which to sober up and face the music, and Brady had sense enough to know he had no time to lose.

Then another snarl had to be disentangled, in which Stannard could not help, since it was purely domestic. The veteran post surgeon had had a flare-up with Mainwaring, all on account of Trooper Hunter. The doctor protested against his patient's being put in the guard-house, declaring that, no matter what the charges were, he was entitled to humane as well as medical treatment. Mainwaring said the man of his own volition had removed himself from hospital, and therefore

deserved no consideration. The doctor said if Hunter were kept in the prison room with the garrison malefactors over-night he would hold Mainwaring responsible for ill results that were certain to occur, which staggered Mainwaring for a minute. He finally compromised, ordered Hunter sent back to hospital, but put in a room by himself with a sentry at the door and another at the window, and orders prohibiting his being seen or spoken to by anybody except the doctors and the steward, unless it were himself or on his own written order.

Then Mainwaring had to go home and face the women-folk, and there for the first time (Miss Leroy, shocked and stunned, having gone to her room) did Mrs. Mainwaring have him to herself and tell him of the identification of Hunter as the polite and helpful stranger of the night on the train. Then furthermore did she add her plea to the doctor's, and finally admit that, much to her own distress and consternation, she feared Pet was actually deeply if not indeed very painfully interested in this mysterious trooper. In justice to Pet, she must say that that young lady was probably unaware of the feeling that had been growing upon her until the *dénouement* of that evening. She, Mrs. Mainwaring, had striven to wean her from the morning services, but without success, and now she knew not what had happened, for Pet had shut herself in her room and begged to be left undisturbed.

Which was more than "Pet" would permit the major to be next day, however, for she was up and on the lookout for him on his return from stables. He marvelled and was shocked at the pallor of her face, the trouble in her eyes. Without preliminary remark, she went straight to her subject.

"Major Mainwaring, at what time and where may I see Trooper Hunter, as you call him, to-day?"

"Well—l, I'm sure I don't know, Kate;" for the major, like many a lion among men, was a lamb among women. "I—don't think you —ought to wish to see him."

"But I do wish it, major. Moreover, I should be ashamed of myself if I did not." And the reply conveyed all the more weight because of the calm decision of her manner.

And so the first written order Mainwaring signed was one to permit the bearer to visit the prisoner Hunter, and at ten o'clock that morning, when, pale, calm, but resolute as ever, and smiling still, despite her sleepless night, Miss Leroy entered the hospital for the customary reading, she sent the steward to tell Mr. Hunter that she hoped he would be able to see her soon after eleven, and then indomitably went on with her self-appointed task.

At eleven-fifteen the post surgeon came, silently gave her his arm, as they left the big sunshiny ward, and led her to a door-way up the corridor in front of which a sentry was pacing,—a sentry who halted and presented arms as the doctor opened the door and ushered her in.

It was that night that Merriweather was brought back from town to the guard-house, shot and stabbed as has been said. Mrs. Merriweather had fled during the previous night, and the sergeant had been missing since reveille. It was the next night that Stannard returned and had Brady hunted up. Then came new labors and honors for

Sheriff Conway, and this time there were no troops to divide the honors of the capture with him, for his prisoners were deserters all,—one from an over-indulgent husband, the others from a not too indulgent Uncle Sam. Pawnee was the Mecca of the fugitives. Thither had Mrs. Merriweather fled to a married sister. Thither had Croxford and Elzey followed, after having remained to cover her retreat and settle matters with the sergeant,—which they had done only too effectually, for Merriweather's days were numbered.

Two days later Stannard had straightened out affairs at the post in marvellous fashion (all save matters domestic,—wherein, said he, no wise man meddled), and the man to start him on the right scent was that scapegrace the Kid, whom he had disciplined time and again in Arizona days and appreciated at his true value. The Kid's derisive and explosive laughter when told that Major Mainwaring had ordered Trooper Hunter confined as accessory to the magazine robbery, etc., had been promptly reported to Stannard on his return, and that versatile young reprobate was sent for, marched to the adjutant's office, and collared by his old-time troop commander,—for one of his several enlistments the Kid had spent with Stannard, and knew him well.

And this was what the Kid divulged. Every one knew he could use a lasso like a cowboy, and Croxford had asked him, just for deviltry, to join him and "some other fellers" in roping the swell, Hunter, on the midnight relief; and he was going to, but happened to hear that Merriweather was in it, and that set him to thinking. He'd heard the women talking about Mrs. Merriweather's boasting that she had made a conquest of the swell recruit, and he remembered Merriweather's black eye and the rumor that it was Hunter "laid him out," and the Kid scented mischief and backed out. Then Croxford came and told him it would be best for him to keep his promise, as he might get the credit of it anyhow; which prompted the Kid to tell them all to go to Ballyhack. But when Elzey and Hughes later came and "stumped him" to join them in a spree to town that night, and displayed their money, he forgot Croxford's threat in the prospect of whiskey, and, anything for a frolic, started with them, only to run foul of the patrol just across the creek.

But the moment he heard of Hunter's being hauled out of the stream after the explosion the whole plot dawned on him, and something more; for he remembered the stories of forage and cartridges being sold in town, and saw that it was planned to fix the guilt on Hunter, and, if not, to fix the crime of the assault on the sacred person of a sentry upon himself, the innocent Kid. Then Stannard would have cross-questioned the two deserters, for such they were, despite stalwart protestations that they were only out for twenty-four hours' fun; but detectives, ferreting their movements, warned him to make no attempt. Merriweather might make an ante-mortem statement, but not these men. Neither would Mrs. Merriweather "peach." She was in the county jail, begging piteously to be taken to her Danny, and declaring he and she were only going to Pawnee to see her sister for a day, and he must have been waylaid in town.

But while Stannard was waiting for Merriweather to regain con-

sciousness and Brady to become once more a responsible being, there came still another witness, an old carpenter and new citizen of Butte, who appeared at Ransom, sorely troubled on account of a friend there enlisted whom he hadn't seen for many a day,—not, in fact, since the morning of the train-robbery,—and had just heard of him as having been arrested for complicity in the robbery of the magazine. Stannard heard his story, which was that the accused was a man of means, a charitable, kind gentleman who, just for a whim, had come out to enlist for a while in the cavalry; that he had helped him, the carpenter, to a home and work and his wife to health, and his clothes and things were all at his, the ex-tramp carpenter's, house, and couldn't he see Mr. Hunter? Whereupon Stannard said, "Come on," took him to the hospital, and marched into the room where, seated in an easy-chair, was the invalid benefactor, and with him the old surgeon and the young lady. Dr. Jayne, it seems, had suddenly discontinued his attentions to both the patient and the nurse.

It struck Stannard unpleasantly at the time that no one of them looked pleased at his coming; but men are obtuse. A woman would have appreciated the impropriety of interruption at a glance.

And even while they stood there, hesitant, at the door, the steward came hurriedly to say that Merriweather was conscious, and had asked for his wife and a priest. The two veteran majors, trooper and doctor, hastened at once to the greater ward, and Hunter, smiling, held forth a long, thin, white hand.

"The ring I left with you would slide off the biggest of these fingers now, wouldn't it?" he asked.—"Miss Leroy, this is Mr. Murray, now a resident of Butte, but a fellow-passenger with us on the night of the collision."

Before the sounding of the retreat that night and the boom of the sunset gun, Sergeant Merriweather's soul had drifted away over the dreary waste of snow-clad slopes and leagues of prairie, but not before he had made clean breast of all his trials, temptations, and downfall. His vain, empty-headed, frivolous wife was brought out from Butte, but proved scant comfort to his dying hours. To Father Keefe and Stannard, Blake and Ray, he told his piteous tale, Kittie sniffling, sobbing, wailing at intervals, but ever intently listening. One extravagance after another had swamped him. He used the money of the men's Athletic and Dramatic Association, of which he was treasurer. He stole forage from the stables and sold it to a dealer in Butte to cover his shortage, but, that not yielding enough, planned the robbery of the magazine, which took place, Croxford and Elzey assisting, one furiously stormy night. They worked the old ordnance sergeant with liquor and got his keys, took out the boxes of cartridges, revolvers, etc., and, lo! the wagon of their confederates in Butte failed to come. It was beaten back by the storm. They then ran everything to the stack nearest Merriweather's stable and cottage and hid the plunder underneath. Dawn almost surprised them at the task. Luckily, the old sergeant was made too sick to go to his magazine for two days. They had arranged for the wagon to come out the next night, and then to blow up the magazine and so destroy evidence of their guilt, but again there

was failure; and Merriweather was at his wits' end when he heard the colonel say that stack must be moved on the morrow. Then, rain or shine, snow or sleet, the wagon had to come, and then it was found, too late to change the hour, that the swell recruit, Hunter, was on the very post that guarded the stacks and stables, and would be there at the very time they needed to act. So to robbery they were compelled to add assault.

The plunder was safely run off to Butte and paid for at about one-fifth its cost and one-tenth its value in a frontier city. They got their money, and felt measurably safe so long as Hunter remained in hospital, used up as a result of the fearful contusions he had received. But his wife had told them of her encounter with and revelations to Hunter, and their fears of discovery were such that Croxford and Elzey determined to desert. The news that Hunter was arrested as having guilty knowledge of the whole affair was a thunderbolt. Now in self-defence he would have to produce even a woman as witness, and that woman Merriweather's wife. 'Twas Merriweather who bade her go at once to Pawnee, whither Croxford and Elzey followed. The three men were to meet and divide their spoils in a certain saloon in town. The first two demanded more than their share. There was a quarrel, then a murderous battle. They took all he had and fled, but, with fatuous blundering, had gone to Pawnee to buy her silence, and there all three were jailed. Hunter was an innocent man.

And when this was told to Mainwaring he bellowed, "Then what in dash-dashnation did Brady mean by his story?" For Brady's story was practically this.

That he and Rawson occupied a room together over the one fine restaurant in Pawnee, and one night they were having supper in one box when a party of four railway hands came into that adjoining, talking loudly about the engineer of 783, old Jim Long, and the swell that engineered the hold-up,—how he had pretended to be out there to enlist in the cavalry, how he had tried to ride with and get points from Long, and had two or three of his gang on that very train all ready for business, but was scared off by the fact that there was a car-load of soldiers. Then when the train-robbery did take place they nabbed seven of the followers after a long chase, but never got the leaders at all. Why, one of them was right there at the fort this very day, enlisted so as to divert suspicion, and he was keeping his hand in by engineering other robberies. That magazine explosion they had read about was all his doing.

If Brady had not been addled he could have remembered that Hunter had enlisted before the train-robbery took place. But he posted back to Butte, gave Mainwaring a wildly exaggerated account of what he had heard, vowed he could bring the men with him next trip, and Mainwaring, already suspicious, had ordered Hunter's arrest accordingly.

The fact that Hunter could not have been connected with the robbery was pointed out to Mainwaring as they sat in consultation, Stannard, Mainwaring, Truscott, and Dana, in the adjutant's office that night, Blake being still in limbo, and Ray being excluded because he had

resented Mainwaring's refusal to allow him an interview with his imprisoned trooper. It was pointed out that Hunter's enlistment occurred some time previous to the train-robbery, and none present happened to think of the fact that he had asked for and obtained a pass the very night before it happened. Then Brady was sent for, and with him came his comrade, still on leave from Winthrop, Mr. Rawson.

"You hear how completely Sergeant Merriweather's ante-mortem statement has cleared Hunter, gentlemen," said Stannard. "Now I suppose you are satisfied."

"As to that point, major, yes," said Mr. Rawson, with preternatural *sang-froid*. "But I understand you have ordered his release, and he is to come here presently for his exoneration. Is that so?"

"Certainly," growled Stannard. "What of it?"

"Well, first I would ask the trooper when he comes to say where he was at the time of the robbery of the train." And Rawson's face beamed with the consciousness of calm conviction of an erring brother's guilt.

Stannard nodded brusquely. "Entirely unnecessary, Mr. Rawson," said he: "that has already been settled. He has witnesses in plenty—three, at least, here at the post or in town—to establish where he was at that very time. He spent that night and the morning following at the house of one Murray, a carpenter in Butte."

Brady and Rawson exchanged glances indicative of incredulity, but Rawson then went on:

"In justice to my friend Mr. Brady and myself, I ask that he be required then to bring with him the silver-topped flask the steward says he has there in his room this very day, and explain where he was the morning of the train-robbery, if not with the robbers."

Stannard snorted derisively, but sent the order as requested, and just as the first call was sounding for tattoo, Trooper Hunter, pallid, yet calm and self-possessed, and decidedly prepossessing, was ushered in and stood patiently at attention.

Stannard looked him carefully over, and said, "Did you bring that flask?" to which the soldier calmly replied,—

"I did, sir, rather unwillingly."

"Why unwillingly?"

"Because," and here a quiet smile flickered over his face, "it is hardly a part of a private soldier's equipment. But it has only been in my possession a few hours since my joining the regiment, and I've not had time to send it away."

Then Stannard turned in his chair and glared at Brady and Rawson. "Well, what do you wish to ask about this flask?"

Rawson rose deliberately. "First, that it be placed here on the table where all can see it; then, that I may be permitted to read this." And he unfolded a newspaper.

Very coolly the soldier stepped forward and handed the handsome toy to Stannard, who gazed admiringly at it and placed it in the full light of the lamps on the table of the commanding officer.

Then, clearing his throat, the lieutenant began:

"Among the passengers arriving in this city from the East to-day

is Lord Lunemouth, eldest son and heir of the Earl of Lancaster. Lord Lunemouth is travelling for his health, and has been advised to seek the glorious climate of California, but has met with unpleasant experiences on the way. His train was held up by desperadoes in Wyoming, the passengers were robbed, and his personal losses consisted of some two hundred dollars in cash, a superb watch, and a handsome, silver-topped flask, the arms of his noble house engraved on the stopper. The latter he valued as a keepsake. Here follows," said Mr. Rawson, "a description of the arms. Here," said he, lifting the flask, "are the arms and motto of the house of Lancaster; and now perhaps this gentleman, whom I perfectly well remember seeing in very different attire aboard the Pacific express the night of the collision, will explain how he came into possession of the missing flask of Lord Lunemouth?"

Then Mainwaring's face was indeed a sight to see, but the amaze deepened, broadened, almost overmastered him, when, with perfect composure, the strange trooper replied,—

"With pleasure; though this is not Lord Lunemouth's, but the mate to it. It was given to me by a member of the house of Lancaster months ago. At the time of the train-robbery it was not in my possession at all. For further information on that head I must refer you to Major Mainwaring."

"House of Lancaster be blowed!" was that veteran's explosive reply. "It was in my house right here at Ransom at that very time. Say, Rawson, you and Brady haven't had any more sense in this matter than—I have!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A REMARKABLE winter, from a cavalry point of view, was that; the first which the old regiment spent at Ransom, but, like many other things temporal and most things military, it came to an end, and people looking back upon it afterwards declared they were rather sorry, after all, for there was so much to make it vividly interesting at the time and to form topics for talk in the weeks to come.

Sensations flattened out lamentably for nearly a fortnight after the quashing of Mainwaring's martial indictment against "the swell of the sorrel troop," as Blake described Hunter, and when they reopened, about the height of the holiday season, other names and households than those herein mentioned were mainly conspicuous, although Blake managed to mix in more than one of them. Between him and Mainwaring was patched a truce, based primarily on the latter's admission that he had probably made a mess of the whole business, but really couldn't be held responsible in the face of such testimony as was offered by prominent officers of the —th,—Messrs. Brady and Rawson. Then Blake apologized for comparing the head of the junior major to the wreck of the magazine, and peace with honor, though not without difficulty, was established so far as the men were concerned. It was, in fact, less difficult than in the case of the women, for Miss Leroy had, it seems,

a very pretty will of her own, that Mrs. Mainwaring could neither bend nor break. Mrs. Mainwaring was of an old and distinguished family, and so was Miss Leroy, and the woman Miss Leroy most seriously affected was Mrs. Blake, *née* Bryan, daughter of a rather dissolute old ranchman once well known about Russell. It stung Mrs. Mainwaring that her niece should have, as she said to her and whispered to others, so little pride. The story spread in the regiment through what was whispered, not through what was said, and Miss Leroy, already popular, became a hot favorite forthwith.

She had come to spend the winter, but as soon as the holidays were over and her precious post children had had their Christmas-tree and other Christmas joys—even before the new year was fairly ushered in—she returned from the morning reading one day and found Mrs. Mainwaring impatiently awaiting her. There were invitations for dinners, etc., extending a week, even ten days, ahead, and Mrs. Mainwaring wished to know which it was her niece's pleasure to accept, and was aghast at the reply: any that might be acceptable to aunty up to January 5th, none for her after that date, as she would then have to return to New York.

Remonstrance proved utterly useless. The second week in January saw Miss Leroy, accompanied to the station by most of the ladies and a few of their lords, safely aboard the East-bound train, with old 783 and Jimmy Long in the lead. There were dozens of the children there to bid her good-by. There were even a number of enlisted men, with whom she warmly shook hands before she took her seat in the roomy Pullman. Captain and Mrs. Blake, her devoted friends, went with her as far as Omaha, where she was to join another party. Mrs. Mainwaring fairly dissolved in tears as they kissed each other good-by; for, after all, Kate was the daughter of a long-loved, long-lost brother, if she was headstrong and independent, and never yet had woman left the dingy precincts of old Ransom so generally and thoroughly esteemed.

But every one wondered for all that—even the many who would not give their thought expression—whether an understanding did not exist, whether she was not going with the expectation of meeting somewhere the remarkable recruit by the name of Hunter, for Hunter had left on a month's furlough just ten days before.

Mrs. Mainwaring declared that Kate's sole reason for going was that she was too conscientious. She found her health restored (no one remembered having heard of it as impaired), and she felt she must return to her kindred in the East and resume her interrupted duties there. But Mrs. Stannard and other wise women well knew that the main reason for her going was that life with Uncle and Aunt Mainwaring was not as peaceful or congenial, despite their pride in and affection for her, as it should have been.

And then there was still another and more vital reason. "Everybody" was talking about her interest in Trooper Hunter and his undoubted admiration for her. But Hunter had had to go back to duty with his troop, had met Miss Leroy only on the long afternoons and evenings when he, with two or three other blue-jackets, worked at

the festooning and decorating, under her active supervision, of the post assembly hall. Then he had had an interview with Ray, his captain, that brought matters to a climax. He applied for and received his furlough in the midst of the holidays,—left his kit with the first sergeant, his uniform with Murray, the carpenter, and Butte in a snowstorm, the Pullman smoker, and familiar-looking tweeds, travelling-cap, and ulster, at which Jim Long stared in astonished recognition when, as he alighted from his cab at the Junction, a swell civilian stepped up and smilingly tendered him a cigar.

Whatever clouds had lowered over the house of Hunter were wafted away the night of that decisive conference of the powers, when Stannard and Truscott demolished the theories of Mainwaring and the aspersions of Brady & Company. Even Conway had limped out of his buggy a few days later to say he, too, had been fooled. (He was destined to be fooled still more when a jail-delivery turned loose his seven star performers on Christmas Eve.) Corporal Croxford and Trooper Elzey still maintained their conviction of Hunter's guilt, until Mrs. Merriweather weakened over her husband's death and confirmed his whole confession. The Kid was enjoying a temporary relapse into virtue, and was wearing a halo until pay-day. Mrs. Merriweather, bailed out by Freeman, was living in temporary retirement in Butte, yet already beginning to "take notice," and all Ransom was wondering what Trooper Hunter had gone on thirty days' furlough for, and betting two to one that he never would come back, when he suddenly came.

He had been gone but twenty of the thirty days. He reported in person in the nattiest of fatigue uniforms to Captain Ray just before stable-call one sharp, clear January afternoon, and in a brief conversation asked of his captain that he would send to Miss Leroy a little package he had brought with him from the East, and was manifestly disappointed when told that she had gone.

Then they probably had not met at all, and Ransom was off the scent again.

Just what might have been the result of this disappointment had matters remained in the usual midwinter plane of monotony, cannot be stated. What did happen was a sudden call from the department commander, a sudden demand for a strong escort to accompany him to the Hills, despite the biting weather, for sacred Indian lands were being invaded, and only his presence could prevail upon the Sioux to trust the matter of righting the wrong to him and Uncle Sam. Him they trusted readily enough, but shook their shaggy heads at mention of the Great Father. "Let the Gray Fox leave enough soldiers here to drive away the would-be miners and prospectors, and they would keep the peace." And so it was ordered. March and April saw the swell trooper deeply interested now, despite longings for news from civilization, in daily contact with and study of these warlike people, learning their uncouth language, buying their furs and bead-work, winning their good will by unexpected gifts and straightforward dealing. May came, and trouble. Congress was too busy with other matters to heed the request of the President that the recommendations of the general com-

manding the department of the frontier be immediately carried out. The horned cattle and other supplies failed to arrive. The Indians said, "Sold again," and scalped an attaché of the nearest agency as a hint of what might happen to the agent himself if he didn't expedite those supplies. Mid-May failed to bring the goods, but it brought the grass, and that was enough. Storm-signals had been set for a fortnight, yet the tornado burst with sudden and shocking force. Five hundred warriors swooped suddenly into the lower valley of the Ska. Out went every available man from Ransom, Rossiter, and Winthrop, and there was war to the knife ere the Gray Fox could interpose.

A "dandy" battalion was that with which Mainwaring danced away that sweet May morning, men and horses the pictures of health and high condition and eager for the field and the fray. Stannard with his four troops had marched eastward for the lower valley, but Mainwaring was to hasten to the Hills, gather up the little force still in stockade at the nearest agency, then sweep on down to join the others. The telegraph line was repaired to Crested Butte, where the mutiny began, and there came this startling message just in time to meet them:

"Sioux agency reports that Lord Lunemouth and party of friends, twelve in all, including guides, passed up the Ska *en route* to the northern hills two days before the outbreak. Use all means in your power to find and protect them. Acknowledge receipt and report action."

It was forwarded to Mainwaring by Atherton, who said he was coming post-haste to take command in person in that part of the field; meantime to lose not a moment, but do his best. As usual, the call went out for Ray.

Two days later, away up among the pine-crested heights, hot on the trail of a big war-party of Indians the sorrel troop was pushing. Mainwaring, with the three remaining companies, was trotting down into the valley of the North Fork to intercept and beat back further parties should they be tempted to follow their friends in the search for the unsuspecting tourists. Atherton, with the Winthrop battalion at his heels, was coming across country to the support of Mainwaring, while old Stannard, on familiar ground, was rounding up stragglers down the Ska, herding them back to the agency, and eagerly watching for the coming of the troops from Rossiter and the big posts away to the north. Then the Indians would be hemmed in.

But meantime what damage might they not do! There were no railways then save the few trunk lines, no means, except by marching, to reach the fabled Indian lands, and Lo was in his glory. Warned of their peril, settlers, herders, and stockmen had taken to flight and abandoned the lower valley, so the Indian was riding, proud monarch of all he surveyed, over the broad waste of the low lands, burning, pillaging, and raising, as the newspaper men first on the scene expressed it, "no scalps, but much hell." If only good news could be heard of those tourists, all might yet be well.

But what mad-brained trick could have prompted so hazardous a picnic? The agent at Brulé Springs swore he had done his best to

dissuade them, but there were three Englishmen who had never seen elk and were possessed with longing to stalk and shoot them. They were lavish with their money. Their interpreters talked directly to some of the old chiefs, Thunder Eagle and Rolling Bear especially, and the presents made these warriors caused the Sioux to clamor for more, but won a lordly permit from the crafty leaders to go shoot what they would,—the Sioux wouldn't care,—and so led them squarely into the trap. Ray had found the débris of one of their camps towards noon of the second day of his daring march, and four hours later as he sped along their northward winding trail he came suddenly upon a deep cleft among the hills, away down in whose depths trickled an ice-cold rivulet where the tourists had drunk their fill, then gone on up the opposite heights, and after them, swift pursuing, a formidable war-party that had evidently come up this tributary to the Ska hoping here to find and intercept their prey.

Men and horses of Ray's troop both were weary. They drank eagerly, and some eyes, already haggard, looked appealingly at the set face of their captain. Forty-eight hours had they come with but scant halt for rest, and there was hardly a man in the party that could not have slept instantly had he lain down on that soft, inviting turf,—all, perhaps, but the indomitable leader and the tall trooper originally of the centre set of fours, yet so often on this second day riding side by side with, instead of following six yards behind, his commander, the place where the orderly is supposed to be. Scott, the young lieutenant, who should perhaps have taken exception to such favoritism, seemed to understand and object not at all. "Hunter was up through here last month with surveyor's escort," was the explanation, and, though some men might have growled the information that "other fellers were along too," no one seemed to object, for the reason that it was thoroughly known that Hunter made topographical notes from day to day and had them with him now, and it was these to which Ray so frequently referred as they hastened on.

Plainly enough had the captain seen the symptoms of growing exhaustion on both his men and mounts,—the dark lines under the deep-set eyes, the utter silence that prevailed along the dusty little company, the painful stumbling of the horses, and the constant effort needed to keep closed on the head of column. But he knew his men, and they knew him. It was not the first by many times they had been called upon to ride with life or death the stake. Somewhere, not three hours ahead, probably, was a murderous band of Sioux seeking to redress undoubted injuries by the only method the Indian knows,—the blood of the pale-faced brothers of those that had wrought the wrong. That these tourists had bought the consent of their chief to hunt, camp, and explore through the Indian lands, that they were innocent of wrong-doing, that they despised the robbers of the red man as much as the Indian hated him, had no bearing on the case. These were white men, rashly intruding far within the Brulé lines at a time when the Great Spirit, through their medicine-men, had sounded the call to battle, and high or low, rich or poor, English or American, man, woman, or child, it made no difference. That fated party represented just

so many coveted scalps, no more and no less, and if Indian strategy could compass their capture alive or their destruction without the spilling of a drop of Indian blood, all the more would their warrior band receive the acclamations of a tribe that worshipped prowess like unto that of the prairie wolf or fleet-footed fox. Ninety strong, led by a daring young chief whose father and mother both had died when the soldiers of the Long Hair dashed upon their village some years before, they had cut loose from all bands around the Ska, and hastened in search of the white invaders guaranteed by old Rolling Bear safe-conduct not a week before.

And unerringly their instinct led them to the lovely park country on the north side of the hills, for there was noble game in profusion. Thither must the lordly whites have gone, rich in horses, arms, stores, and provisions of every kind, and for months the Sioux were starving.

It was the sight of the fresh hoof-prints of fourscore ponies that settled all question of rest at the rivulet in the mind of Captain Ray. "Men," said he, "I hate to wear you out, but before another sunrise we must circumvent these fellows, or it's all up with the tourists."

There were Irish troopers in the leading four who loved to talk of the Clan na-Gael and Home Rule for Erin and death to "England's cruel red" when time hung heavy on their hands in camp or barrack. But that seemed all forgotten now. Like the famous Mavericks, they only talked of mutiny when no other fighting was to be done. Only the horses seemed to groan at the command to mount, and once more on went the Sorrels *au secours*.

An hour after nightfall, in the bright light of the climbing moon, they had splashed through another shallow, foaming stream in another and narrower rift among the hills, two veteran sergeants, with Ray and Hunter, well out in front, when just as the foremost, a shadowy form, rode warily to a little point of bluff three hundred yards ahead, Ray's gauntleted hand swung high his scouting hat in air, as half turning in saddle he signalled "Halt!" for the leading rider was gesticulating wildly, and Sergeant Conners came galloping back.

"Treed 'em, by God, sir!" he cried, in excitement irrepressible. "They've stopped for a scalp-dance. You can hear 'em plain."

Yes, faint, but distinct, beating quicker every minute, the weird throb of the war-drum could be heard, and with it the shrill whoop and yell of excited dancers.

"Then you're right, Hunter," promptly spoke the captain. "That can mean only one thing. They've located the party over in Keogh's Park, just where you said they'd pitch their camp, and these beggars mean to jump them at dawn. We'll show 'em a trick worth ten of that, won't we, Dixie?" he continued, patting the neck of the game little sorrel he rode. "What blessed luck that they should stop to celebrate!"

Slowly, cautiously, the shadowy troop led forward to a grove of pines not far from the water's edge, and close to the sheltering bluff beyond which the warriors were having their jollification. There they waited, breathless, the sound of revelry gaining every minute on the night. Taking Conners and Hunter with him, Ray crept forward to

reconnoitre,—he and his sergeant veterans in the craft, Hunter a novice, whose heart beat wildly, but who never faltered.

Fast and furious drove the dance. Loud and shrill arose the whoops and war-cries, dying away at times like the yelp of prairie wolves to faint and distant gurgling, then swelling again like the chorus of hounds in full view of the quarry. Drum, rattle, and piercing whistle added to the clamor, echoed back from the dark, pine-crested cliffs that overhung this wild nook in the hills. Fresh fagots heaped upon the fire threw the dusky, writhing forms, resplendent in war-bonnet and savage finery, into bold relief, and Ray's brave heart almost sank within him as he counted. Ponies they could not see, for they were herded farther up the cove beyond the fire, but every indication pointed to there being well-nigh a hundred well-armed warriors right there within revolver-shot, while others, doubtless, hovered like watchful spies about the unsuspecting camp beyond the range.

"We could never get past them without discovery," muttered the captain, finally. "We're far too few to drive them. How far is it back down the valley and around to the park?"

"Not less than forty miles, sir," answered Hunter, "though it can't be more than six or seven over the old game trail across the range."

"Then," said Ray, "there's nothing for it but to send a brace of men up the heights afoot to warn the camp before daybreak, while the troop hangs on to their heels."

It was barely nine o'clock now, and high aloft on the northern side of the gorge, glistening white, the cliffs broke through the sombre fringe of pine and shone like silver in the moonlight. Somewhere ahead of the watchers in the black depths of the westward end of the deep ravine an old game trail wound and twisted up the mountain side over into the beautiful park beyond. Hunter well remembered and had traced it in his notes. Over this trail Lord Lunemouth's joyous party had evidently gone. Over this the Indian scouts had tracked him. Over this the war-party doubtless meant to follow in time to make their dash at daybreak. Over this, neck or nothing, warning must be sent, and the intermediate ground was so completely occupied by the Indians that cavalry could not hope to slip by undetected. It could only be attempted by daring fellows afoot.

And the first man to speak out when, in few words, Ray explained the situation to the troop, was that incorrigible rascal, the Kid. "I'm game to go, sir."

"Good for one," said Ray.

"Here's another, sir," "And here," "And here," came in low tone from half a dozen in the wearied troop, but Ray waited for still another voice, until, half turning, he looked as though inquiringly at Hunter, who had already kicked off his boots and was pulling on a pair of moccasins, drawn from his saddle-bags. Then Hunter looked up and spoke.

"I, of course, sir. I'm the only man that knows the way." Whereat Ray's white teeth gleamed in the moonlight, and the men knew all was well.

Three hours later a strangely assorted pair, a tall, slender, blond-

bearded man, with clear-cut, handsome features, and an undersized, weazen-faced, devil-may-care Irish lad, dressed alike in dark-blue shirts and blouses, in light-blue riding-breeches and Indian-tanned leggings, girt with cartridge-belt and revolver, and carrying the brown carbine in hand, halted for breath at the very summit of the divide between Keogh's Park and the deep gorge in the southeastward hills. Perilous, indeed, had been their journey. Leaving their comrades well below the position of the Indian camp, they had slowly scaled the cliffs to the north, then crept along among the pines until immediately above the rejoicing Indians, and then, slowly and cautiously through the scattered timber, followed westward by the stars until at last in a depression they came upon the trail, easily recognizable in the occasional patches of moonlight. Then, eager and cautious, they followed up, up the winding way, ever alert for sound of hoof-beat, until at last they reached the crest and Hunter's watch proclaimed it midnight.

From a rocky point they could see outspread beneath them to the northward a beautiful park country, faintly pictured in the silvery light, and, laying a hand on his companion's sleeve, Hunter pointed afar down to their left front.

"The springs lie just south of that high butte," he murmured, "and there we'll find their camp, if only we can dodge the Indian watchers on the way."

Ay, there was the rub, and there was no time to lose. Ever watchful, as before, they began the gradual descent, peering from tree to tree, flitting like shadows from rock to rock, until at last they reached the lower limit of the timber-line, and there before them lay an almost open valley, two miles wide, destitute of "cover" except along the stream that nearly equally divided it, and up that stream, perhaps two miles, some white objects gleamed in the moonlight near a clump of trees, and there at Keogh's Springs, just as Hunter had predicted, lay the threatened camp.

But how were they to reach it unobserved? for here and everywhere the Kid could point out fresh pony-tracks, and even as they paused at the belt of pines, away out on the slopes beyond, hidden from camp by intervening rises in the ground, dark forms of horsemen, three or four, were plainly visible, and the Kid could tell from old experience that nothing living would escape those watchers' eyes.

But up the slope the trees were thicker, and again, though wearily, they sought their shelter, and slowly crawled from clump to clump until towards three o'clock they were nearly opposite the sleeping camp, lying out there in a lovely glade, barely long rifle-shot away.

Twice, thrice they had seen an Indian on nimble pony, moving cautiously about, well out of sight of camp. Time and again the coyotes yelped and loud-mouthed challenge was bayed by suspicious watch-dogs near the tents, but still the Saxons slept all innocent of danger, and time was getting fearfully short.

"What's to hinder our crawling out as far as we can go? then, if we're seen, shoot the sucker that tries to stop us, and run for it," muttered the Irishman. "It's the only chance I see."

The moon was well over to the west, but still so high her light

betrayed every moving object in the open ground; but, as the Kid explained, there seemed to be no other way. Down went the two flat upon their stomachs, and the slow, tortuous process began. Before they had made a hundred yards Celtic patience gave out. "Damned if I can stand this," said the Irishman. "There's not an Indian in sight now. Come on. Let's run for it."

Suiting action to the word, the little sinner was on his feet, and in another minute skimming away like a racer to the goal.

And then as Hunter started to follow he saw a sight that made him thrill with dread. As though they sprang from the bowels of the earth, two Indians on swift ponies darted into view, and, bending low over their chargers' necks, lashing them to mad gallop, they fairly shot across the resounding, turf-clad prairie, swift and straight towards the scudding form.

"Look out, Kid! Look out!" rang Hunter's voice in a yell that woke the valley. Bang! went the Paddy's ready carbine in reply. Dogs, coyotes, carbines, rifles, Indian yells, and Saxon blasphemy burst upon the silence of the night. An Indian pony plunged and tossed his rider sprawling within a dozen yards of where the Kid had turned at bay, and Hunter, rushing to the rescue, had just time to kneel, when two or three revolvers seemed to crack at once, and the air was rent with fire-flashes. But the soldier's aim was true, and one tall warrior toppled heavily forward and bit the dust as Hunter sped on to his comrade's aid. He found him clasping his hands about his knee and rolling in agony on the turf.

"For the love of God, don't stop!" cried he. "They've smashed my leg, and I'm done for. There's a dozen to one of us." Dozen or not, they were in for it now. Hunter knelt, and, though his heart beat hard, sent shot after shot at every flitting form he saw, until, amazed at the vigorous defence, the Indians seemed to haul away. Then up he lifted the protesting Kid and lugged him full another hundred yards before again he had to drop him and fight. Then once more, half lifting, half dragging, he rushed him on, cheered by the evidence that the Indians dared not come too close and that camp was aroused and blazing away. Luckily, the guides had quickly realized what was up. Luckily, they reasoned that there could be but few Indians in the immediate neighborhood, for out they came—three or four—to the succor of the burdened man, and reached him only as, exhausted by his efforts and by loss of blood from a wound hardly noticed when received, he sank, fainting, to the ground, the Kid still pluckily swearing in his arms.

And so, an hour later, when the Indians swooped in force upon the camp they found it thoroughly prepared, surrounded by hastily constructed rifle-pits or breastworks, around which, five hundred yards away, they dashed and yelled and kept up their wild fusillade, but both times they strove to charge three or four saddles were emptied by the cool aim of the defence, and then, to cap the climax of their discomfiture, out from the foot-hills burst their old acquaintance the sorrel troop, "Laughing Lightning," as once the Cheyennes had named Ray, cheering in the lead. And the warriors broke for cover, and kept in

cover at respectful distance until Mainwaring himself, a whole day later, with his three comrade troops, came trotting up the valley, and then they disappeared entirely.

But meantime there had been a meeting and recognition little looked for. Four happier Englishmen were never seen than Lunemouth and the trio with him, for no other reason than that for a time their lives had been in mortal peril and they had enjoyed the unlooked-for luxury of a square fight. That exultation over, they had had time to thank the American "Tommies" to whose daring they owed it that they were not massacred in their beds. Both troopers were wounded, the little fellow profanely voluble, the tall one strangely silent. Over this latter bent the younger of the first two Englishmen.

"You are not much hurt, I hope, my good fellow? You're—— Good God! You?—Gray? I vow I heard you were dead."

A faint smile flitted about the bearded face, and the prostrate soldier winced as he answered: "And you, Rokeby, I heard you were married."

Even when Mainwaring came, it was useless to resume trooper relations, for he found Hunter installed in the best cot the tourists owned, the Kid, too, in clover, despite the pain of his wound. The doctor said Hunter's hurt would not soon heal, and Lord Lunemouth vowed that both were his guests until they could be safely moved, and rather plainly intimated to the major that he considered one particular private, at least, of more account than the battalion commander, which was subversive of good order and military discipline. Then of course Mainwaring had to hear the truth, already known to Ray and rumored throughout the Sorrels, that their swell comrade was even an older friend of these swells from abroad.

"Then where in thunder was it I met you before?" growled Mainwaring, in distinct sense of personal injury, as he looked down into the placidly smiling face of the wounded trooper, and Blake nearly exploded with delight over the cool response:

"At the armory of my old regiment, when the major was on recruiting service in New York City. I had the honor of being on the reception committee the night of our ball."

"Good God!" said Mainwaring; "and yet you look just like a fellow that deserted from the Dragoons."

No, Hunter didn't rise to a commission. There was talk about it, but he had acquired other views. He is said to have remarked that the "N.G.N.Y. would suffice in the future." His wounds proved painful; an honorable discharge was asked for and granted, and there was a big time at the agency when he and the Kid bade good-by to their comrades and were taken back to Ransom in an ambulance, the Kid "rich beyond the dreams of avarice" with the largesse of Lancaster, and Gray parted with only after his promise to spend a month at the ancestral seat that very year.

Later Hunter went East. The Blakes and Rays heard from him frequently for several weeks. He was once more under his uncle's roof, once more in daily company with the bereaved widower, now re-

stored to partial health and unexpected fortune since the tragic death of his wife; but when the hope of the house of Lancaster went back to England, Lunemouth's lung in surprising working order, Gray, who might have gone, declined. The Langdons were still abroad somewhere, and Amy wore no coronet. It had somehow dawned on Rokeby that that coronet was an indispensable adjunct to the engagement, and the glorious climate of California had played havoc with Amy's expectations. There was some society talk of Gray's going in search of that lovely but disappointed damsel, and "No doubt," said he to a serious-faced, beautiful-eyed young woman with whom he was found limping along the sands one August evening at the sea-shore, "no doubt I should have gone and been refused again, but for just one thing."

"And what was that, pray?" asked Miss Leroy, a quiver about her lips despite her nonchalance of manner, for he had been her shadow since he came.

"This," said he, taking from an inner pocket a worn little glove of undressed kid. "It was dropped by my bedside when I lay in hospital at Ransom. I have been looking, longing for the hand that lost it, ever since."

THE END.

OYSTER-PLANTING AND OYSTER-FARMING.

SINCE the beginning men have delighted in the food provided for them by the mollusks, and the shell-heaps which formed the débris of their feasts upon these delicacies remain until now in all regions of the world where Nature has produced creatures of the genus Mollusca.

Of all species of the mollusks, the oyster has been and is the favorite. Of these Nature has been so marvellously prolific in their development that they are to be found in abundance in nearly all seas. And the oyster-rocks have yielded a goodly proportion of the food of savage and civilized men in all ages, along the shores of their nativity.

To-day the oyster-interest is one of the most important industries; it gives employment to thousands of persons, and millions of dollars of capital are invested therein. There is a constantly growing demand for them, at present much in excess of their natural productive power: so that the increase of the oyster-supply is one of the practical questions of the time. By the application of modern methods the oyster-grounds are made to yield far beyond the natural supply; and by proper care they can be made to produce an almost unlimited quantity.

In early days oysters were to be found in lavish abundance along all our coasts. Nearly all the creeks and inlets along the sea-coast of New York State abounded with a fine quality of oysters. In Nieuw Amsterdam, in 1621, "very large oisters" were so common that a market could not be found for them, as any one could supply himself from the beds. In 1671 Arnoldus Montanus, and in 1681 Sir George Calvert, reported that the new settlements had among other advantages oysters a foot long in great plenty. Letters written about the same time contain such statements as these: "At Amboy Point and several other places there is abundance of brave oysters;" "Oysters such as I think would serve all England;" "We have one thing more particular to us, which the others want also, which is vast oyster banks, which is the constant fresh victuals during the winter to English as well as Indians. Of these there are many all along our coast, from the sea as high as against New York, whence they come to fetch them."

Peter Kalm, who wrote upon the subject in 1748, says, "The Indians who inhabited the coast before the arrival of the Europeans have made oysters and other shell-fish their chief food; and at present, whenever they reach salt water where oysters are to be got, they are very active in catching them, and sell them in great quantities to other Indians who live higher up in the country; for this reason you see the immense numbers of oyster and mussel shells piled up near such places, where you are certain that the Indians formerly built their huts." He also states that the oyster-beds were within view of the town of New York in 1748, and that the oystermen were able to earn

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